THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

35¢ JUNE

You're Another DAMON KNIGHT

Artifact CHAD OLIVER

SAKI P. G. WODEHOUSE EVELYN E. SMITH

Salter

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 8, No. 6 JUNE

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In the second issue of this magazine, we published what is still one of my favorite stories: that wry and logical variant of the Last Man theme, Damon Knight's Not With a Bang. *(Formally, damon knight should be written with minuscules, like e. e. cummings; but printers and copyreaders are apt to be stuffy about such niceties.) It's taken me five years to lure another story out of Mr. Knight; and what he has finally come up with is such an unalloyed delight that I wonder how you've been able to endure five years of F&SF without his presence. Knight has proved himself (in numerous magazines, professional and amateur) to be the ablest critic of science-fantasy now writing. He is also easily one of the ablest creators, as in this zany and entrancing adventure, which begins with pratfalls and goes on through speculations on luck, randomness and time to an unexpected ending which explains many things in your own life . . . and incidentally the origin of the Manhattan skyline. If that synopsis sounds a bit wacky . . . well, I don't know where you'll find a wackier (or more enjoyable) tale of future speculation than this.*

You're Another

by DAMON KNIGHT

IT WAS A WARM SPRING SATURDAY, and Johnny Bornish spent the morning in Central Park. He drew sailors lying on the grass with their girls; he drew old men in straw hats, and Good Humor men pushing their carts. He got two quick studies of children at the toy-boat pond, and would have had another, a beauty, except that somebody's damned big Dalmatian, romping, blundered into him and made him sit down hard in the water.

A bright-eyed old gentleman solemnly helped him arise. Johnny thought it over, then wrung out his wet pants in the men's rest room, put them back on and spread himself like a starfish in the sun. He dried before his sketchbook did, so he took the bus back downtown, got off at 14th Street and went into Mayer's.

The only clerk in sight was showing an intricate folding easel to a tweedy woman who didn't seem to know which end was which. Johnny picked up the sketchbook he

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wanted from a pile on the table, and pottered around looking at clay figures, paper palettes and other traps for the amateur. He glimpsed some interesting textured papers displayed in the other aisle and tried to cross over to them, but misjudged his knobby-kneed turning circle, as usual, and brought down a cascade of little paint cans. Dancing for balance, somehow he managed to put one heel down at an unheard-of angle, buckle the lid of one of the cans and splash red enamel all over hell.

He paid for the paint, speechless, and got out. He had dropped the sketchbook somewhere, he discovered. Evidently God did not care for him to do any sketching today.

Also, he was leaving little red heel-prints across the pavement. He wiped off his shoe as well as he could with some newspaper from the trashbasket at the corner, and walked down to the Automat for coffee.

The cashier scooped in his dollar and spread two rows of magical dimes on the marble counter, all rattling at once like angry metal insects. They were alive in Johnny's palm; one of them got away, but he lunged for it and caught it before it hit the floor.

Flushed with victory, he worked his way through the crowd to the coffee dispenser, put a china cup under the spigot and dropped his dime in the slot. Coffee streamed out, filled his cup and went on flowing.

Johnny watched it for a minute. Coffee went on pouring over the lip and handle of the cup, too hot to touch, splashing through the grilled metal and gurgling away somewhere below.

A white-haired man shouldered him aside, took a cup from the rack and calmly filled it at the spigot. Somebody else followed his example, and in a moment there was a crowd.

After all, it was his dime. Johnny got another cup and waited his turn. An angry man in a white jacket disappeared violently into the crowd, and Johnny heard him shouting something. A moment later the crowd began to disperse.

The jet had stopped. The man in the white jacket picked up Johnny's original cup, emptied it, set it down on a busboy's cart, and went away.

Evidently God did not care for him to drink any coffee, either. Johnny whistled a few reflective bars of "Dixie" and left, keeping a wary eye out for trouble.

At the curb a big pushcart was standing in the sunshine, flaming with banana yellows, apple reds. Johnny stopped himself. "Oh, no," he said, and turned himself sternly around, and started carefully down the avenue, hands in pockets, elbows at his sides. On a day like what this one was shaping up to be, he shuddered to think what he could do with a pushcart full of fruit.

How about a painting of that? Semi-abstract — "Still Life in Mo-

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tion." Flying tangerines, green bananas, dusty Concord grapes, stopped by the fast shutter of the artist's eye. By Cézanne, out of Henry Moore. By heaven, it wasn't bad.

He could see it, big and vulgar, about a 36 by 30 — (stretchers: he'd have to stop at Mayer's again, or on second thought somewhere else, for stretchers) the colors grayed on a violet ground, but screaming at each other all the same like a gaggle of parakeets. Black outlines here and there, weaving a kind of cockeyed carpet pattern through it. No depth, no light-and-dark — flat easter-egg colors, glowing as enigmatically as a Parrish cut up into jigsaw pieces. Frame it in oyster-white moulding — wham! The Museum of Modern Art!

The bananas, he thought, would have to go around this way, distorted, curved like boomerangs up in the foreground. Make the old ladies from Oshkosh duck. That saturated buttery yellow, transmuted to a poisonous green . . . He put out a forefinger absently to stroke one of the nearest, feeling how the chalky smoothness curved up and around into the dry hard stem.

"How many, Mac?"

For an instant Johnny thought he had circled the block, back to the same pushcart: then he saw that this one had only bananas on it. He was at the corner of 11th Street; he had walked three blocks, blind and deaf.

"No bananas," he said hurriedly, backing away. There was a shriek in his ear. He turned; it was a glitter-eyed tweedy woman, brandishing an enormous handbag.

"Can't you watch where you're —"

"Sorry, ma'am," he said, desperately trying to keep his balance. He toppled off the curb, grabbing at the pushcart. Something slithery went out from under his foot. He was falling, sliding like a bowling ball, feet first toward the one upright shaft that supported the end of the pushcart. . . .

The first thing that he noticed, as he sat there up to his chest in bananas, with the swearing huckster holding the cart by main force, was that an alert, white-haired old gentleman was in the front rank of the crowd, looking at him.

The same one who —?

And come to think of it, that tweedy woman —

Ridiculous.

All the same, something began to twitch in his memory. Ten confused minutes later he was kneeling asthmatically on the floor in front of his closet, hauling out stacks of unframed paintings, shoeboxes full of letters and squeezed paint tubes, a Scout ax (for kindling), old sweaters and mildewed magazines, until he found a battered suitcase.

In the suitcase, under untidy piles of sketches and watercolors, was a small cardboard portfolio. In the portfolio were two newspaper clippings.

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One was from the *Post*, dated three years back: it showed Johnny, poised on one heel in a violent adagio pose, being whirled around by the stream of water from a hydrant some Third Avenue urchins had just opened. The other was two years older, from the *Journal:* in this one Johnny seemed to be walking dreamily up a wall — actually, he had just slipped on an icy street in the upper 40's.

He blinked incredulously. In the background of the first picture there were half a dozen figures, mostly kids.

Among them was the tweedy woman.

In the background of the second, there was only one. It was the white-haired old man.

Thinking it over, Johnny discovered that he was scared. He had never actually enjoyed being the kind of buffoon who gets his shirttail caught in zippers, is trapped by elevators and revolving doors, and trips on pebbles; he had accepted it humbly as his portion, and in between catastrophes he'd had a lot of fun.

But suppose somebody was *doing* it to him?

A lot of it was not funny, look at it any way you like. There was the time the bus driver had closed the door on Johnny's foot and dragged him for three yards, bouncing on the pavement. He had got up with nothing worse than bruises — but what if that passenger hadn't seen him in time?

He looked at the clippings again. There they were, the same faces — the same clothing, even, except that the old man was wearing an overcoat. Even in the faded halftones, there was a predatory sparkle from his rimless eyeglasses; and the tweedy woman's sharp beak was as threatening as a hawk's.

Johnny felt a stifling sense of panic. He felt like a man waiting helplessly for the punchline of a long bad joke; or like a mouse being played with by a cat.

Something bad was going to happen next.

The door opened; somebody walked in. Johnny started, but it was only the Duke, brawny in a paint-smeared undershirt, with a limp cigarette in the corner of his mouth. The Duke had a rakish Errol Flynn mustache, blending furrily now into his day-old beard, and a pair of black, who-are-you-varlet brows. He was treacherous, clever, plausible, quarrelsome, ingenious, a great brawler and seducer of women — in short, exactly like Cellini, except he had no talent.

"*Hiding?*" said Duke, showing his big teeth.

Johnny became aware that, crouched in front of the closet that way, he looked a little as if he were about to dive into it and pull overcoats over his head. He got up stiffly, tried to put his hands in his pockets, and discovered he still had

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the clippings. Then it was too late. Duke took them gently, inspected them with a judicial eye, and stared gravely at Johnny. "Not flattering," he said. "Is that blood on your forehead?"

Johnny investigated; his fingers came away a little red, not much. "I fell down," he said uncomfortably.

"My boy," Duke told him, "you are troubled. Confide in your old uncle."

"I'm just — Look, Duke, I'm busy. Did you want something?"

"Only to be your faithful counselor and guide," said Duke, pressing Johnny firmly into a chair. "Just lean back, loosen the sphincters and say the first thing that comes into your mind." He looked expectant.

"Ugh," said Johnny.

Duke nodded sagely. "A visceral reaction. Existentialist. You wish to rid yourself of yourself — get away from it all. Tell me, when you walk down the street, do you feel the buildings are about to close on you? Are you being persecuted by little green men who come out of the woodwork? Do you feel an overpowering urge to leave town?"

"Yes," said Johnny truthfully.

Duke looked mildly surprised. "Well?" he asked, spreading his hands.

"Where would I go?"

"I recommend sunny New Jersey. All the towns have different names — fascinating. Millions of them. Pick one at random. Hackensack, Perth Amboy, Passaic, Teaneck, Newark? No? You're qute right — too suggestive. Let me see. Something farther north? Provincetown. Martha's Vineyard — lovely this time of the year. Or Florida — yes, I can really see you, Johnny, sitting on a rotten wharf in the sunshine, fishing with a bent pin for pompano. Peaceful, relaxed, carefree. . ."

Johnny's fingers stirred the change in his pocket. He didn't know what was in his wallet — he never did — but he was sure it wasn't enough. "Duke, have you seen Ted Edwards this week?" he asked hopefully.

"No. Why?"

"Oh. He owes me a little money, is all. He said he'd pay me today or tomorrow."

"If it's a question of money —" said the Duke after a moment.

Johnny looked at him incredulously.

Duke was pulling a greasy wallet out of his hip pocket. He paused with his thumb in it. "Do you really want to get out of town, Johnny?"

"Well, sure, but —"

"Johnny, what are friends *for?* Really, I'm wounded. Will fifty help?"

He counted out the money and stuffed it into Johnny's paralyzed palm. "Don't say a word. Let me remember you just as you are." He made a frame of his hands and squinted through it. He sighed, then picked up the battered suitcase and

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went to work with great energy throwing things out of the dresser into it. "Shirts, socks, underwear. Necktie. Clean handkerchief. There you are." He closed the lid. He pumped Johnny's hand, pulling him toward the door. "Don't think it hasn't been great, because it hasn't. So on the ocean of life we pass and speak to one another. Only a look and a voice; then darkness and silence."

Johnny dug in his heels and stopped. "What's the matter?" Duke inquired.

"I just realized — I can't go now. I'll go tonight. I'll take the late train."

Duke arched an eyebrow. "But why wait, Johnny? When the sunne shineth, make hay. When the iron is hot, strike. The tide tarrieth for no man."

"They'll see me leave," said Johnny, embarrassed.

Duke frowned. "You mean the little green men actually are after you?" His features worked; he composed them with difficulty. "Well, this is — Pardon me. A momentary aberration. But now don't you see, Johnny, you haven't got any time to lose. If they're following you, they must know where you live. How do you know they won't come here?"

Johnny, flushing, could think of no adequate reply. He had wanted to get away under cover of darkness, but that would mean another five hours at least. . . .

"Look here," said Duke suddenly, "I know the very thing. Biff Feldstein — works at the Cherry Lane. Your own mother won't admit she knows you. Wait here."

He was back in fifteen minutes, with a bundle of old clothes and an object which turned out, on closer examination, to be a small brown beard.

Johnny put it on unwillingly; using gunk from a tube Duke had brought along. Duke helped him into a castoff jacket, color indistinguishable, shiny with grease, and clapped a beret on his head. The result, to Johnny's horrified gaze, looked like an old-time Village phony or a peddler of French postcards. Duke inspected him judicially. "It's magnificent, but it isn't war," he said. "However, we can always plant vines. *Allons!* I am the grass; I cover all!"

Walking toward Sixth at a brisk pace, a hand firmly on Johnny's elbow, Duke suddenly paused. "Ho!" he said. He sprang forward, bent, and picked something up.

Johnny stared at it glassily. It was a five-dollar bill.

Duke was calmly putting it away. "Does that happen to you often?" Johnny asked.

"Now and again," said Duke. "Merely a matter of keeping the eyes in focus."

"Luck," said Johnny faintly.

"Never think it," Duke told him. "Take the word of an older and wiser man. You make your own luck

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in this world. Think of Newton. Think of O'Dwyer. Hand stuck in the jam jar? You asked for it. Now the trouble with you —"

Johnny, who had heard this theory before, was no longer listening. Look, he thought, at all the different things that had had to happen so that Duke could pick up that fiver. Somebody had to lose it, to begin with — say because he met a friend just as he was about to put the bill away, and stuffed it in his pocket instead so he could shake hands, and then forgot it, reached for his handkerchief — All right. Then it just had to happen that everybody who passed this spot between then and now was looking the other way, or thinking about something else. And Duke, finally, had to glance down at just the right moment. It was all extremely improbable, but it happened, somewhere, every day.

And also every day, somewhere, people were being hit by flowerpots knocked off tenth-story window ledges, and falling down manholes, and walking into stray bullets fired by law enforcement officers in pursuit of malefactors. Johnny shuddered.

"Oh-oh," said Duke suddenly. "Where's a cab? Ah — Cabby!" He sprang forward to the curb, whistling and waving.

Looking around curiously, Johnny saw a clumsy figure hurrying toward them down the street. "There's Mary Finigan," he said, pointing her out.

"I know," said Duke irascibly. The cab was just pulling in toward them, the driver reaching back to open the door. "Now here we go, Johnny —"

"But I think she wants to talk to you," said Johnny. "Hadn't we —"

"No time now," said Duke, helping him in with a shove. "She's taken to running off at the mouth — that's why I had to give her up. Get moving!" he said to the driver, and added to Johnny, "Among other things, that is . . . Here will be an old abusing of God's patience, and the King's English."

As they pulled away into traffic, Johnny had a last glimpse of the girl standing on the curb watching them. Her dark hair was straggling down off her forehead; she looked as if she had been crying.

Duke said comfortably, "Every man, as the saying is, can tame a shrew but he that hath her. Now there, John boy, you have just had an instructive object lesson. Was it luck that we got away from that draggle-tailed ear-bender? It was not. . . ."

But, thought Johnny, it was. What if the cab hadn't come along at just the right time?

"— in a nutshell, boy. Only reason you have bad luck, you go hunting for it."

"That isn't the reason," said Johnny.

He let Duke's hearty voice fade once more into a kind of primitive background music, like the mutter-

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ing of the extras in a Tarzan picture when the Kalawumbas are about to feed the pretty girl to the lions. It had just dawned on him, with the dazzling glow of revelation, that the whole course of anybody's life was determined by improbable accidents. Here he stood, all five feet ten and a hundred thirty pounds of him — a billion-to-one shot from the word go. (What were the chances against any given sperm's uniting with any given ovum? *More* than a billion to one — unimaginable.) What if the apple hadn't fallen on Newton's head? What if O'Dwyer had never left Ireland? And what did free will have to do with the decision not to become, say, a Kurdish herdsman, if you happened to be born in Ohio?

. . . It meant, Johnny thought, that if you could control the random factors — the way the dice fall in a bar in Sacramento, the temper of a rich uncle in Keokuk, the moisture content of the clouds over Sioux Falls at 3:03 CST, the shape of a pebble in a Wall Street newsboy's sock — you could do anything. You could make an obscure painter named Johnny Bornish fall into the toy-boat pond in Central Park and get red paint all over his shoe and knock down a pushcart . . .

But why would you want to?

The airport waiting room was a little like a scene out of *Things to Come*, except that the people were neither white-robed, leisurely nor cool.

Every place on every bench was taken. Duke found a couple of square feet of floor space behind a pillar and settled Johnny there, seated on his upended suitcase.

"Now you're all set. Got your ticket. Got your magazine. Okay." Duke made an abrupt menacing gesture in order to look at his wristwatch.

"Got to run. Now remember, boy — send me your address as soon as you get one, so I can forward your mail and so on. Oh: almost forgot." He scribbled on a piece of paper, handed it over. "Mere formality. Payable at any time. Sign here."

He had written, "I O U $50." Johnny signed, feeling a little more at home with Duke.

"Right. Oll korrect."

"Duke," said Johnny suddenly. "Mary's pregnant, isn't she?" His expression was thoughtful.

"It has been known to happen," said Duke good-humoredly.

"Why don't you give her a break?" Johnny asked with difficulty.

Duke was not offended. "How? Speak the truth to me, Johnny — do you see me as a happy bridegroom? Well —" He pumped Johnny's hand. "The word must be spoken that bids you depart — Though the effort to speak it should shatter my heart — Though in silence, with something I pine — Yet the lips that touch liquor must never touch mine!" With a grin that seemed to linger, like the Cheshire Cat's, he disappeared into the crowd.

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II

Uncomfortably astride his suitcase, solitary among multitudes, Johnny found himself thinking in words harder and longer at a time than he was used to. The kind of thinking he did when he was painting, or had painted, or was about to paint was another process altogether, and there were days on end when he did nothing else. He had a talent, Johnny Bornish. A talent is sometimes defined as a gift of the gods, a thing that most people, who have not had one, confuse with a present under a Christmas tree.

It was not like that at all. It tortured and delighted him, and took up so much room in his skull that a lot of practical details couldn't get in. Without exaggeration, it obsessed him, and when occasionally, as now, its grip relaxed, Johnny had the comical expression of a man who has just waked up to find his pocket picked and a row of hotfoot scars around his shoes.

He was thinking about luck. It was all right to talk about everybody making his own, and to a certain extent he supposed it was true, but Duke *was* the kind of guy who found money on the street. Such a thing had happened to Johnny only once in his life, and then it wasn't legal tender, but a Japanese coin — copper, heavy, about the size of a half-dollar, with a chrysanthemum symbol on one side and a character on the other. He thought of it as his lucky piece; he had found it on the street, his last year in high school, and here — he took it out of his pocket — it still was.

. . . Which, when you came to think of it, was odd. He was not superstitious about the coin, or especially fond of it. He called it a lucky piece for want of a better name, because the word "keepsake" had gone out of fashion; and in fact he believed that his luck in the last ten years had been lousy. The coin was the only thing he owned that was anywhere near that old. He had lost three wristwatches, numberless fountain pens, two hats, three or four cigarette lighters, and genuine U. S. nickels and dimes by the handful. But here was the Japanese coin.

Now, how could you figure a thing like that, unless it was luck . . . or *interference?*

Johnny sat up straighter. It was a foolish notion, probably born of the fact that he hadn't had any lunch; but he was in a mood to read sinister significance into almost anything.

He already knew that the old man and the tweedy woman had been interfering in his life for at least five years, probably longer. Somehow, they were responsible for the "accidents" that kept happening to him — and *there* was a foolish and sinister notion for you, if you liked. Believing that, how could he help wondering about other

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odd things that had happened to him, no matter how small . . . like finding and keeping a Japanese coin?

With that kind of logic, you could prove anything. And yet, he couldn't rid himself of the idea.

Idly, he got up holding the coin and dropped it into a nearby waste can. He sat down on his suitcase again with a feeling of neurosis well quelled. If the coin somehow found its way back to him, he'd have evidence for thinking the worst of it; if it didn't, as of course it wouldn't, small loss.

"Excuse me," said a thinnish prim-faced little man in almost-clerical clothes. "I believe you dropped this. A Japanese coin. Quite nice."

Johnny found his tongue. "Uh, thank you. But I don't want it — you keep it."

"Oh, *no*," said the little man, and walked stiffly away.

Johnny stared after him, then at the coin. It was lumpishly solid, a dirty-looking brown, nicked and rounded at the edges. Ridiculous!

His mistake, no doubt, had been in being too obvious. He palmed the coin, trying to look nonchalant. After a while he lit a cigarette, dropped it, and as he fumbled for it, managed to shove the coin under the leg of the adjoining bench.

He had taken one puff on the retrieved cigarette when a large hulk in a gray suit, all muscles and narrowed eyes, knelt beside him and extracted the coin. The hulk looked at it carefully, front and back; weighed it in his palm, rang it on the floor, and finally handed it over to Johnny. "This yours?" he asked in a gravelly voice.

Johnny nodded. The hulk said nothing more, but watched grimly until Johnny put the coin away in his pocket. Then he got up, dusted off his knees, and went away into the crowd.

Johnny felt a cold lump gather at the pit of his stomach. The fact that he had seen this same routine in at least half a dozen bad movies gave him no comfort; he did not believe in the series of natural coincidences that made it impossible to get rid of the neatly wrapped garbage, or the incriminating nylon stocking, or whatever.

He stood up. It was already twenty minutes after his plane's scheduled departure time. He *had* to get rid of the thing. It was intolerable to suppose that he couldn't get rid of it. Of course he could get rid of it.

The low false roof of the baggage counter looked promising. He picked up his suitcase and worked his way toward it, and got there just as the p. a. system burst forth with "*Flight number mnglang for Buzz-clickville, now loading at Gate Lumber Lide.*" Under cover of this clamor, Johnny swiftly took the coin out of his pocket and tossed it out of sight on the roof.

Now what? Was somebody going to fetch a ladder, and climb up

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there after the coin, and come down and hand it to him?

Nothing at all happened, except that the voice on the p. a. emitted its thunderous mutter again, and this time Johnny caught the name of his destination, Jacksonville.

Feeling better, he stopped at the newsstand for cigarettes. He paid for them with a half dollar, which was promptly slapped back into his palm.

"*Flight mumble sixteen for Jagznbull, now loading at Gate Number Nine,*" said the p. a.

After a moment Johnny handed back the cigarettes, still staring at the Japanese coin that lay, infuriatingly solid, on his palm. . . . He had had a fifty-cent piece in his pocket; it didn't seem to be there now; argal, he had thrown it up on top of the baggage counter. A natural mistake. Only, in ten years of carrying the coin around with him, he had never once mistaken it for a half-buck, or vice versa, until now.

"*Flight number sixteen . . .*"

The tweedy woman, Johnny realized with a slow chill crawling down his back, had been ahead of him in the art store, talking to a clerk. She couldn't have been following him — on the bus, in a cab, or any other way; there wouldn't have been time. She had known where he was going, and when he was going to get there.

It was as if, he thought, while the coin seemed to turn fishily cold and smooth in his fingers, it was just as if the two of them, the tweedy woman and the old man, had planted a sort of beacon on him ten years ago, so that wherever and whenever he went, he was a belled cat. It was as if they might be looking in a kind of radarscope, when it pleased them, and seeing the track of his life like a twisted strand of copper wire coiling and turning. . . .

But of course there was no escape, if that was true. His track went winding through the waiting room and onto a particular aircraft and down again, where that plane landed, and into a particular room and then a particular restaurant, so that a day from now, a month, a year, ten years from now, they could reach out and touch him wherever he might be.

There was no escape, because there was a peculiarity built into this brown Japanese coin, a combination of random events that added up to the mirth-provoking result that he simply couldn't lose it.

He looked around wildly, thinking *Blowtorch. Monkey wrench. Sledgehammer.* But there wasn't anything. It was a great big phony Things-to-Comeish airport wildcat waiting room, without a tool in it anywhere.

A pretty girl came out from behind the counter to his right, swinging up the hinged section of counter and letting it down again behind

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her. Johnny stared after her stupidly, then at the way she had come out. His scalp twitched. He stepped to the counter, raised the hinged section.

A bald man a few feet away stopped talking to wave a telephone handset at Johnny. "No admittance here, sir! No admittance!"

Johnny put the Japanese coin down at an angle on the place that supported the end of the hinged section. He made sure it was the Japanese coin. He wedged it firmly.

The bald man dropped his telephone and came toward him, hand outstretched.

Johnny slammed the hinged section down as hard as he could. There was a dull *bonk*, and an odd feeling of tension; the lights seemed to blur. He turned and ran. Nobody followed him.

The plane was a two-engined relic that looked faintly Victorian from the outside; inside, it was a slanting dark cavern with an astonishing number of seats crammed into it. It smelled like a locker room. Johnny stumbled down the narrow aisle to what seemed to be the only remaining place, next to a large dark gentleman in an awning-striped tie.

He sat down, a little awkwardly. He had had a peculiar feeling ever since he had bashed the coin with the counter section, and the worst of it was that he couldn't pin it down. It was a physical something-wrong feeling, like an upset stomach or too little sleep or a fever coming on, but it wasn't exactly any of those things. He was hungry, but not that hungry. He thought the trouble might be with his eyes, but whenever he picked out anything as a test, it looked perfectly normal and he could see it fine. It was in his skin, perhaps? a kind of not-quite-prickling that . . . No, it wasn't his skin.

It was a little like being drunk, at the fraction of an instant when you realize how drunk you are and regret it . . . it was like that, but not very much. And it was partly like the foreboding, stronger and more oppressive than before—*Something bad was going to happen.*

The pilot and copilot walked up the aisle and disappeared into the forward compartment. The door was shut; the stewardess, back in the tail, was poring over the papers on her clipboard. After a while the starters whined and the engines came to life; Johnny, who had flown only once before, and on a scheduled airline at that, was startled to find what a devil of a racket they made. There was another interminable wait, and then the plane was crawling forward, swinging its nose around, crawling a little faster, while an endless blank expanse of concrete slipped by — lumbering along, then, like some huge, preposterous, and above all flightless bird — and lifting incredibly, a few inches up, airborne, the runway falling back, tilted, dwindling until they were up, high above the mist on the

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water, steady as a hammock in the rasping monotone drone of the engines.

Something went *flip* at the corner of Johnny's vision. He turned his head.

Flop.

It was a little metallic disk that went *flip* up the carpet like a tiddlywink or a Mexican jumping bean, and paused for an instant while his jaw began to come loose at the hinge, and went *flop*. It lay on the carpet next to his seat, and went *hop*.

It landed on his knee, a little brown metallic disk with a chrysanthemum design, bent across the middle. He brushed at it. It hopped, and clung to his hand like a magnet to steel.

"Good heavens!" said an explosive voice in his ear.

Johnny had no attention to spare. He had taken hold of the coin with his other hand — a horrid feeling; it clung clammily to his fingers, and pulled away from his palm with reluctance — and now he was trying to scrape it off against the fabric of the seat. It was like trying to scrape off his own skin. He gave up and furiously began shaking his hand.

"Here, friend, don't do that!" The dark man in the next seat half rose, and there was a moment of confusion; Johnny heard a sharp click, and thought he saw something leap from the dark man's vest pocket. Then, for an instant, he had clinging to his fingers a brown Japanese coin *and* a pair of glittering pince-nez. And then the two had somehow twisted together in a nasty, writhing way that hurt his eyes to watch, and uncurled again — no coin, no pince-nez, but an impossible little leather change purse.

Had the coin ever been a coin at all? Was the change purse a change purse?

"Now look what you've done! *Ugh!*" The dark man, his face contorted with passion, reached gingerly fingers toward the purse. "Don't move, friend. Let me —"

Johnny pulled away a trifle. "Who are you?"

"F.B.I.," said the dark man impatiently. He flapped a billfold at Johnny; there was some kind of official-looking shield inside. "Now you have torn it, my God! Hold that still — just like that. Don't move." He pulled back his sleeves like a conjuror, and began to reach very cautiously for the little brown bit of leather that clung to Johnny's hand.

The thing twitched slightly in his fingers. The next moment, people all around them began getting up and crowding into the aisle, heading for the single washroom back in the tail of the plane.

Palpably, the plane tilted. Johnny heard the stewardess shrieking, "One at a time! One at a time! Take your seats, everyone — you're making the airplane tail-heavy!"

"Steady, steady," moaned the

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dark man. "Hold it absolutely still!"

Johnny couldn't. His fingers twitched again, and abruptly all the passengers in the aisle were tumbling the other way, fighting to get away from the dangerous tail. The stewardess came helplessly after them, squalling futile orders.

"Am I doing that?" Johnny gasped, staring in horror at the thing in his palm.

"The gadget is. Hold it steady, friend —"

But his hand twitched again, and abruptly all the passengers were back in their seats, quietly sitting as if nothing had happened. Then a chorus of shrieks arose. Looking out the window, Johnny saw a terrifying sea of treetops just below, where nothing but empty air had been the moment before. As the plane nosed up sharply, his hand moved again —

And the shrieks grew louder. Up ahead loomed a blue-violet wall of mountain, topless, gigantic.

His fingers twitched still again: and once more the plane was droning peaceably along between earth and heaven. The passengers were bored or sleeping. There was no mountain, and no trees.

Sweat was beaded on the dark man's forehead. "Now . . ." he said, gritting his teeth and reaching again.

"Wait a minute," said Johnny, pulling away again. "Wait — This is some kind of top secret thing, is it, that I'm not supposed to have?"

"Yes," said the dark man, agonized. "I tell you, friend, don't move it!"

The purse was slowly changing color, turning a watery violet around the edges.

"And you're from the F.B.I.?" Johnny asked, staring hard at the dark man.

"Yes! Hold it steady —"

"No," said Johnny. His voice had a disposition to tremble, but Johnny held it firmly in check. "You forgot about your ears," he said. "Or are they too hard to change?"

The dark man showed his teeth. "What are you talking about?"

"The *ears*," Johnny said, "and the jawbone. No two people have ears alike. And before, when you were the old man, your neck was too thick. It bothered me, only I was too busy to think about it." He swallowed hard. "I'm thinking about it now. You don't want me to move this thing?"

"Right, friend, right."

"*Then tell me what this is all about.*"

The dark man made placating gestures. "I can't do that, friend. I really can't. Look —"

The tiny weight shifted in Johnny's hand. "— out!" shouted the dark man.

Tiny flickerings gathered in the air around them. In the plane window, the clear blue of the sky abruptly vanished. Instead, Johnny saw a tumbling waste of gray cloud. Rain drummed against the window,

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and the plane heeled suddenly as if a gust had caught it.

Scattered shrieks arose from up forward. Johnny swallowed a large lump, and his fingers twitched. The flickering came again.

The cloud and rain were gone; the sky was an innocent blue again. "*Don't* do that," said the dark man. "Listen, look: You want to know something? Watch me try to tell you." He moistened his lips and began, "When you have trouble —" but on the fourth word his throat seemed to tighten and lock. His lips went on moving, his eyes bulged with effort, but nothing came out.

After a moment he relaxed, breathing heavily. "You see?" he said.

"You can't talk," said Johnny. "About that. Literally."

"Right! Now, friend, if you'll just allow me —"

"Easy. Tell me the truth: is there any way you can get around this, whatever it is, this block or whatever?" He let his fingers twitch, deliberately, as he spoke. "Any gadget, or anything you can take?"

The dark man glanced nervously out the window, where blue sky had given way to purple twilight and a large sickle moon. "Yes, but —"

"There is? What?"

The man's throat tightened again as he tried to speak.

"Well, whatever it is, you'd better use it," said Johnny. He saw the dark man's face harden with resolution, and jerked his hand away just in time as the dark man grabbed —

III

There was a whirling moment, then the universe steadied. Johnny clutched at the seat with his free hand. The plane and all the passengers were gone. He and the dark man were sitting on a park bench in the sunshine. Two pigeons took alarm and flapped heavily away.

The dark man's face was twisted unhappily. "Now you have done it! Oh, what time is it, anyway?" He plucked two watches out of his vest and consulted them in turn. "Wednesday, friend, at the latest! Oh, oh, they'll —" His mouth worked soundlessly.

"Wednesday?" Johnny managed. He looked around. They were sitting in Union Square Park, the only ones there. There were plenty of people on the streets, all hurrying, most of them women. It looked like a Wednesday, all right.

He opened his mouth, and shut it again carefully. He looked down at the limp bit of leather and metal in his hand. Start from the beginning. What did he know?

The coin, which had evidently been some kind of telltale or beacon, had in some way joined itself, after Johnny had damaged it, to some other instrument of the dark man's — apparently the gadget that enabled him to control probability, and move from one time to another, and small chores like that.

In their present fused state, the two gadgets were ungovernable —

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dangerous, the dark man seemed to think — and no good to anybody.

And that was absolutely all he knew.

He didn't know where the dark man and his companion had come from, what they were up to, anything that would be useful to know, and he wasn't getting any nearer finding out.

— Except that there was some way of loosening the dark man's tongue. Drugs, which were out of the question — liquor —

Well, he thought, sitting up a trifle straighter, there was no harm in trying, anyhow. It might not work, but it was the pleasantest thought he had had all afternoon.

He said, "Come on," and stood up carefully; but his motion must have been too abrupt, because the scene around them melted and ran down into the pavement, and they were standing, not in the park, but on the traffic island at Sheridan Square.

It looked to be a little after noon, and the papers on the stand at Johnny's elbow bore today's date.

He felt a little dizzy. Say it was about one o'clock: then he hadn't got out to the airport yet; he was on his way there now, with Duke, and if he could hop a fast cab, he might catch himself and tell himself not to go. . . .

Johnny steadied his mind by a strenuous effort. He had, he told himself, one single, simple problem now in hand, and that was how to get to a bar. He took a careful step toward the edge of the island. The thing in his hand bobbled; the world reeled and steadied.

With the dark man beside him, Johnny was standing on the gallery of the Reptile Room of the Museum of Natural History. Down below, the poised shapes of various giant lizards looked extremely extinct and very dry.

Johnny felt the rising rudiments of a vast impatience. At this rate, it was clear enough, he would never get anywhere he wanted to go, because every step changed the rules. All right then; if Mahomet couldn't go to the mountain —

The dark man, who had been watching him, made a strangled sound of protest.

Johnny ignored him. He swung his hand sharply down. And up. And down.

The world swung around them like a pendulum, twisting and turning. Too far! They were on a street corner in Paris. They were in a dark place listening to the sound of machinery. They were in the middle of a sandstorm, choking, blinding —

They were sitting in a rowboat on a quiet river. The dark man was wearing flannels and a straw hat.

Johnny tried to move the thing in his hand more gently: it was as if it had a life of its own; he had to hold it back.

Zip!

They were seated on stools at a

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marble-topped counter. Johnny saw a banana split with a fly on it.

Zip!

A library, a huge low-ceilinged place that Johnny had never seen before.

Zip!

The lobby of the Art Theatre; a patron bumped into Johnny, slopping his demitasse.

Zip!

They were sitting opposite each other, the dark man and he, at a table in the rear of Dorrie's Bar. Dust motes sparkled in the late-afternoon sun. There was a highball in front of each of them.

Gritting his teeth, Johnny held his hand perfectly upright while he lowered it, so slowly that it hardly seemed to move, until it touched the worn surface of the table. He sighed. "Drink up," he said.

With a wary eye on the thing in Johnny's hand, the dark man drank. Johnny signaled the bartender, who came over with a faintly puzzled expression. "How long you guys been here?"

"I was just going to ask you," said Johnny at random. "Two more."

The bartender retired and came back looking hostile with the drinks, after which he went down to the farthermost end of the bar, turned his back on them and polished glasses.

Johnny sipped his highball. "Drink up," he told the dark man. The dark man drank.

After the third swift highball, the dark man looked slightly wall-eyed. "How you feeling?" Johnny asked.

"Fine," said the dark man carefully. "Jus' fine." He dipped two fingers into his vest pocket, drew out a tiny flat pillbox and extracted from it an even tinier pill, which he popped into his mouth and swallowed.

"What was that?" said Johnny suspiciously.

"Just a little pill."

Johnny looked closely at him. His eyes were clear and steady; he looked exactly as if he had not drunk any highballs at all. "Let me hear you say 'The Leith police dismisseth us,' " said Johnny.

The dark man said it.

"Can you say that when you're drunk?" Johnny demanded.

"Don't know, friend. I never tried."

Johnny sighed. Look at it any way you liked, the man had been high, at least, before he swallowed that one tiny pill. And now he was cold sober. After a moment, glowering, he pounded on his glass with a swizzle-stick until the bartender came and took his order for two more drinks. "Doubles," said Johnny as an afterthought. When they arrived, the dark man drank one down and began to look faintly glassy-eyed. He took out his pillbox.

Johnny leaned forward. "Who's that standing outside?" he whispered hoarsely.

The dark man swiveled around. "Where?"

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"They ducked back," said Johnny. "Keep watching." He brought his free hand out of his trousers pocket, where it had been busy extracting the contents of a little bottle of antihistamine tablets he had been carrying around since February. They were six times the size of the dark man's pills, but they were the best he could do. He slid the pillbox out from under the dark man's fingers, swiftly emptied it onto his own lap, dumped the cold tablets into it and put it back.

"I don't see anybody, friend," said the dark man anxiously. "Was it a man or —" He picked out one of the bogus tablets, swallowed it, and looked surprised.

"Have another drink," said Johnny hopefully. The dark man, still looking surprised, swilled it down. His eyes closed slowly and opened again. They were definitely glassy.

"How do you feel now?" Johnny asked.

"Dandy, thanks. *Vad heter denna ort?*" The dark man's face spread and collapsed astonishingly into a large, loose, foolish smile.

It occurred to Johnny that he might have overdone it. "How was that again?" Swedish, it had sounded like, or some other Scandinavian language . . .

"*Voss hot ir gezugt?*" asked the dark man wonderingly. He batted his head with the heel of his hand several times. "*Favor de desconectar la radio.*"

"The radio isn't —" began Johnny, but the dark man interrupted him. Springing up suddenly, he climbed onto the bench, spread his arms and began singing in a loud operatic baritone. The melody was that of the Toreador Song from *Carmen*, but the dark man was singing his own words to it, over and over: "*Dove è il gabinetto?*"

The bartender was coming over with an unpleasant expression. "Cut that out!" Johnny whispered urgently. "You hear? Sit down, or I'll move this thing again!"

The dark man glanced at the object in Johnny's hand. "You don't scare me, bud. Go ahead and move it. *Me cago en su* highball." He began singing again.

Johnny fumbled three five-dollar bills out of his wallet — all he had — and shoved them at the bartender as he came up. The bartender went away.

"Well, why were you scared before, then?" Johnny asked, furiously.

"Simple," said the dark man. "*Vänta ett ögenblick*, it'll come back to me. Sure." He clapped a hand to his brow. "*Herr Gott im Himmel!*" he said, and sat down abruptly.

"Don't move it," he said. He was pale and sweat-beaded.

"*Why not?*"

"No control," whispered the dark man. "The instrument is tuned to you — sooner or later you're going to meet yourself. Two bodies can't occupy the same spacetime, friend." He shuddered. "*Boom!*"

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Johnny's hand and wrist, already overtired, were showing a disposition to tremble. He had the hand propped against a bowl of pretzels, and that helped some, but not enough. Johnny was close to despair. The chief effect of the drinks seemed to have been to make the dark man babble in six or seven foreign tongues. The anti-drink pills were safely in his pocket; there was a fortune in those, no doubt, just as a by-product of this thing if he ever got out of it alive — but that seemed doubtful.

All the same, he checked with a glare the dark man's tentative move toward the object in his hand. His voice shook. "Tell me now, or I'll wave this thing until something happens. I haven't got any more patience! What are you after? What's it all about?"

"*Un autre plat des pets de nonne, s'il vous plaît, garçon,*" murmured the dark man.

"And cut that out," said Johnny. "I mean it!" Intentionally or not, his hand slipped, and he felt the table shudder under them.

Zip!

They were sitting at a narrow table in the Sixth Avenue Bickford's, full of the echoing clatter of inch-thick crockery.

"Well?" said Johnny, close to hysteria. The glasses on the table between them were full of milk, not whisky. Now he was in for it. Unless he could break the dark man's nerve before he sobered up — or unless, which was unlikely in the extreme, they happened to hit another bar —

"It's like this, friend," said the dark man. "I'm the last surviving remnant of a race of Lemurians, see, and I like to persecute people. I'm bitter, because you upstarts have taken over the world. You can't —"

"Who's the lady I saw you with?" Johnny asked sourly.

"Her? She's the last surviving remnant of the Atlanteans. We have a working agreement, but we hate each other even more than —"

Johnny's fingers were clammy with sweat around the limp leather that clung to them. He let his hand twitch, not too much.

Zip!

They were sitting facing each other on the hard cane seats of an almost empty subway train, rackety-clacking headlong down its dark tunnel like a consignment to hell. "Try again," said Johnny through his teeth.

"It's like this," said the dark man. "I'll tell you the truth. This whole universe isn't real, get me? It's just a figment of your imagination, but you got powers you don't know how to control, and we been trying to keep you confused, see, because otherwise —"

"Then you don't care if I do this!" said Johnny, and he made a fist around the leather purse and slammed it on his knee.

Zip!

A wind thundered in his ears, snatched the breath from his mouth. He could barely see the dark man,

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through a cloud of flying sleet, hunkered like himself on a ledge next to nowhere. "We're observers from the Galactic Union," the dark man shouted. "We're stationed here to keep an eye on you people on account of all them A-bomb explosions, because —"

"Or this!" Johnny howled, and jerked his fist again.

Zip!

They were sprawled on a freezing plain, staring at each other in the icy glitter of starlight. "I'll tell you!" said the dark man. "We're time travelers, and we got to make sure you never marry Piper Laurie, because —"

Gently, Johnny told himself.

Zip!

They were sliding side by side down the giant chute in the fun house at Jantzen's Beach in Portland, Oregon. "Listen!" said the dark man. "You're a mutant superman, see? Don't get sore — we had to test you before we could lead you into your glorious heritage of —"

As Johnny started to get to his feet, the movement jarred the thing in his hand, and —

Zip!

They were standing on the observation platform on top of the Empire State. It was a cold, raw day. The dark man was shivering — cold, or frightened enough to talk, or too frightened to stay drunk? His voice trembled: "Okay, this is it, friend. You aren't human — you're an android, but such a good imitation, you don't even know it. But we're your inventors, see —"

Gently: it was the little jumps that were dangerous, Johnny reminded himself.

Zip! They were in a revolving door, and *zip!* Johnny was on the staircase of his own rooming house, looking down at the dark man who was goggling up at him, trying to say something, and *zip!* they were standing beside a disordered banana cart while a cold chill ran up Johnny's spine, and —

"All right!" the dark man shouted. There was raw sincerity in his voice. "I'll tell you the truth, but *please* —"

Johnny's hand tilted in spite of himself.

Zip!

They were on the top deck of a Fifth Avenue bus parked at the curb, waiting for a load. Johnny lowered his hand with infinite care to the shiny rail top of the seat ahead. "Tell," he said.

The dark man swallowed. "Give me a chance," he said in an undertone. "I can't tell you — if I do, they'll break me, I'll never get a post again —"

"Last chance," said Johnny, looking straight ahead. "*One . . . Two . . .*"

"It's a livie," the dark man said, pronouncing the first *i* long. His voice was resigned and dull.

"A what?"

"Livie. Like movies. You know. You're an actor."

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"What is this now?" said Johnny uneasily. "I'm a painter. What do you mean, I'm an ac —"

"You're an *actor*, *playing* a painter!" said the dark man. "You actors! Dumb cows! You're an actor! Understand? It's a *livie*."

"What is the livie about?" Johnny asked carefully.

"It's a musical tragedy. All about poor people in the slums."

"I don't live in the slums," said Johnny indignantly.

"*In* the *slums*. You want to tell me, or should I tell you? It's a big dramatic show. You're the comic *relief*. Later on you *die*." The dark man stopped short, and looked as if he wished he had stopped shorter. "A detail," he said. "Not important. We'll fix it up, next script conference." He put his hands to his temples suddenly. "Oh, why was I decanted?" he muttered. "Glorm will split me up the middle. He'll pulverize me. He'll shove me back into the —"

"You're serious?" said Johnny. His voice cracked. "What is this, I die? I die how?" He twitched uncontrollably.

Zip!

The Fifth Avenue bus was gone. They were sitting in the second row of a movie theater. The house lights had just gone up; the audience was shuffling out. Johnny seized the dark man by the shirt-front.

"I forget," said the dark man sullenly. "You fall off something, I think. Right before the end of the livie, when the hero gets to bed with the girl. You want to know who's the hero? Somebody you know. Duke —"

"Fall off what?" said Johnny, tightening his grip.

"Off a building. Into a trash can. Half."

"Comic relief?" said Johnny with an effort.

"Sure. Pratfalls! You'll steal the livie! The lookers'll have heart attacks laughing!"

The sounds of the departing audience abruptly stopped. The walls and ceiling flickered alarmingly; when they steadied, Johnny saw with total bewilderment that they were in a different room altogether. It was nowhere he had ever been before — nowhere, he realized abruptly, with his heart racing, that he ever *could* have been before.

Out across the great silvery bowl, under a cloud-high ceiling, men were floating in the air like gnats, some drifting, some moving quickly around a bulbous metal shape that hung over the center of the huge room. Down below, twenty feet lower than the balcony on which they sat, there was a little puff of light and exploding shape — a brilliant unfolding that lasted only an instant, leaving a crazy memory of moving trees and buildings. After a moment, it happened again.

Johnny was aware that the dark man, beside him, had stiffened and somehow shrunk into himself.

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He turned. Behind them, in the eerie stillness, a silvery man came striding through a doorway.

"*Glorm*," said the dark man, gasping, "*ne estis mia kulpo. Li* —"

Glorm said, "*Fermu vian truon.*" He was slender and sinewy, dressed in something that looked like tinfoil. He had bulging eyes under a broad shelf of brow. He turned them on Johnny. "Now you vill give me d'in*stru*ment," he said.

Johnny found his breath. The bit of leather in his hand, he discovered, was now as rigid as if it were part of an invisible pillar in the air; but he tightened his grip on it, anyhow. "Why should I give it to you?" he demanded.

Glorm gestured impatiently. "Vait." He turned to look out over the enormous sunken bowl, and his voice suddenly echoed everywhere, somehow a hundred times magnified: "*Gi ŝpinu!*"

Again came that flowering of color and movement under the hanging bulge of metal: but this time it sprang into full life, and didn't collapse again.

Fascinated, Johnny stared down over the balcony rim. The floor of the bowl was gone now, buried by a glittering marble street. On either side were white buildings, all porticos and pillars, and down at the end loomed something that looked like the Parthenon, only as big as the main UN building in New York.

The street was aboil with people, dwarfed by distance. They scattered as a four-horse chariot came hurtling past, then flowed together again. Johnny could hear them muttering angrily, like so many bees. There was a curious acrid scent in the air.

Puzzled, he glanced at Glorm and the dark man. "What's that?" he asked, pointing.

Glorm made a gesture. "Rome," said the dark man, shaking as if with a chill. "They're making a spectacle, back in 44 B.C. This here's the scene where Julius Caesar burns the place down because they won't make him Emperor."

Sure enough, the acrid scent was stronger; down below, a thin veil of gray-black smoke was beginning to arise. . . .

"But he didn't," Johnny protested, stung. "That isn't even Rome—the Parthenon's in Athens."

"It used to be," said the dark man. His teeth were chattering. "We changed it. The last outfit that made livies there, they were okay on the little scenes, but they didn't understand spectacle. Glorm —" he cast a furtive glance at the silver man, and raised his voice slightly — "he understands spectacle."

"Let me get this straight now," said Johnny with a thick tongue. "You went to all the trouble of building that phony set, with that crazy Parthenon and all, when you could just go back in time and shoot the real thing?"

"*Bona!*" shouted Glorm's am-

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plified voice. "*Gi estu presata!*" The scene down below whirled in upon itself and winked out.

Glorm turned impatiently to Johnny. "Now," he said. "You not understand. Dat vich you see dere *is* vat you call d'real ding. Ve not built set — built not set — not set — *Kiel oni ĝi diras?*"

"'We din't build no set,'" said the dark man.

"*Putra lingvo!* Ve din build no set. Ve made dat Romans build it. Dey din build no set — dey build Rome, different. Understand? Nobody din build no set! Real Rome! Real fire! Real dead! Real history!"

Johnny gaped at him. "You mean — you're changing history, just to make movies?"

"Livies," the dark man muttered.

"Livies, then. You must all be loopies. Where does that leave the people up in the future? Look — where are we now? What time?"

"Your calendar, uh, 4400-something. About twenty-five hundred years from your time."

"Twenty-five hundred — Well, what does it do to you, when you change the Romans all around?"

"Noddin'," said Glorm emphatically.

"Noddin'?" said Johnny, obtusely.

"Noddin' at all. Vat happens to dog ven you cut off his modder's tail?"

Johnny thought about it. "Noddin'."

"*Korekti.* You dink it is big job?"

Johnny nodded.

"It *is* big job. But ve do it tventy, forty times *every* year. You know how many people live on d'planet now?" Without pausing, he answered himself. "Tirty billion. You know how many go to livies? Half. Fifteen billion. Seven times more people dan live on d'planet in your time. Old, young. Stupid, smart. Livies got to entertain dem all. Not like your Hollyvood. Dat vas not art, not spectacle. Ven d'people tink, deep down —" he tapped his head — "someting is true, den I make it true, and it *is* true! Dat is art! Dat is spectacle!"

"You haven't changed New York much, anyway," said Johnny in self-defense.

Glorm's bulging eyes grew bulgier. "Not change!" He snorted, turned. His amplified voice rang out again: "*Donu al mi flugantan kvieton de Nov-Jorko natura!*"

There was a stirring of floating figures out around the hanging bulge of metal. Glorm cracked his knuckles impatiently. After a long moment the floor of the bowl blossomed again.

Johnny caught his breath.

The illusion was so perfect that the floor seemed to have dropped away: a thousand feet down, Manhattan Island lay spread in the morning sunlight; he could see ships at anchor in the harbor, and the clear glints of the Hudson and the East River running up northward into the mists over the Bronx.

The first thing he noticed was

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that the chaotic checkerboard of low buildings spread over the whole island: the cluster of skyscrapers at the southern tip, and the scattering at midtown, were missing.

"Guess vat year," said Glorm's voice.

He frowned. "About 1900?" But that couldn't be right, he thought uneasily — there were too many bridges: more, even, than in his own time.

Glorm laughed heartily. "Dat vich you see is Nov-York, 1956 — before ve change it. You dink you *in*vent sky*scrap*ers? Oh, no. Me *in*vent it."

"For *Wage-Slaves of Broadway*," said the dark man reverently. "That was his first livie. What a spectacle!"

"Now you un*der*stand?" Glorm asked patronizingly. "Long time I vanted to tell dis to actor, see his face. Good — you un*der*stand now." His lean face was shining. "You are actor — I am producer, director. Producer, director is everyting. Actor is dirt! So you vill give me d'in*stru*ment."

"Won't," said Johnny weakly.

"You vill," Glorm said. "In a minute you have to let go."

Johnny discovered with shock that his hand was growing numb. So this was what they had all been stalling for, all this time. And now they'd got it. He *was* about to let go; he could feel it. So —

"Listen!" he said desperately. "What about the people in the future? — I mean your future. Do they make livies, too? If they do, are you an actor to them?"

Glorm's face tautened with fury. "Kraĉaĵo!" he said. "Vait *un*til —" He stared at the thing in Johnny's hand, and his fingers clenched.

Johnny's grip loosened. He was going to let go, and then what? Back to his own time, and more pratfalls, leading inexorably to —

His whole arm was tired. He was going to have to let go.

. . . And there was nothing he could do about it. That endless chain of tinkerers, Glorms standing on each other's shoulders, all the way up into the unguessable future — that was too big to change. It was, he supposed, no more frightening or terrible than other kinds of macrocosmic tyranny the human mind had imagined; it would be possible to live with it, if only his part weren't so unpleasant. . . .

His hand dropped.

Smiling, Glorm reached out to the suspended bit of leather. His fingers did something to it that Johnny couldn't follow, and abruptly it sagged into his palm.

It shuddered and flickered there for a moment like a top running down. All at once it split into a brown coin and a pair of pince-nez. The flickering came again — a blur of bright shapes: fountain pen, notebook, watch, cigarette lighter — then both objects came to rest, tiny and metallic and dead.

Glorm put them into a fold of his clothing.

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"*Bona*," he said indifferently over his shoulder. "*Resendu tion al Nov-Jorkon.*"

Desperation limbered Johnny's tongue. He started talking before he even knew what he was going to say. "What if I don't stay in New York?"

Glorm paused, looking annoyed. "*Kio?*"

"You've got your gadget back," said Johnny, as the idea took shape in his head. "All right, but what are you going to do if I decide to move to Chicago, or someplace? Or get myself arrested and sent to jail? I mean, you can shuffle the probabilities around — but if I try hard enough, I can put myself where it's *impossible* to have what you want to have happen, happen." He took a deep breath. "See what I mean?"

"*Plejmalpuro*," said Glorm. From his expression, he saw.

"Listen," Johnny said. "Let me get the picture. This Duke you say is the hero — that's the Duke I know?" He got a nod from Glorm. "And that was part of the script, when he helped me get out of town?"

"Dress rehearsal," said the dark man. "You fall in a swamp in Florida — come up all over mud and leeches. A real boff."

Johnny shuddered, and turned his mind resolutely away from leeches and falls from high buildings. . . . "What I want to know is, what was Duke's angle? Why did he think he wanted to get me out of town?"

They told him. The answer was brutally simple, and Johnny had been half afraid that he knew it already.

He waited until his nails unclenched from his palms, and he felt able to talk sensibly again. And even then, he found he had nothing to say. How could you talk to people who would do a thing like that and call it art, or entertainment? It was logical, he supposed, that a culture whose taste demanded Glorm's ruthless spectacles should have such a concept of a "hero." It was also terrifying.

His time was running out again. But the answer to that one occurred to him, too.

If Duke were here, what would he say?

"Okay, look," Johnny said rapidly, "I'm just spitballing, you understand, talking off the top of my head —"

Glorm and the dark man leaned forward with interested, wary expressions.

"— but here's how I see it. Instead of this clown type for your comedy relief, we have this suave man-of-the-world type. It's a switch. A really great, uh, producer-director could put it over. I can really see it. Take for instance — here, show me where it says in the script . . ."

Johnny materialized on the quiet side street a few steps from his door. He felt heavy and tired. The sun was still high over the tops of the old buildings; it was about 2:30

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— an hour and a half after Duke had left him at the airport.

He leaned against a railing and waited. Sure enough, here came Mary Finigan across the street, her hair uncombed, dark circles under her eyes.

"Go home, Mary," he said.

She was startled. "What's the matter, isn't he there? I mean, Duke, called me — he said he was at your place —"

"He's got an ax," said Johnny. "I'm telling you the truth. He was going to kill you in my apartment, with my Scout ax that I use for kindling, with my fingerprints on it."

When she was gone, Johnny went on around the corner and into the foyer. Duke was there with his hand in Johnny's mailbox. He turned around and swore, and his hand twitched a long fat envelope out of the box. "What the devil are you doing here, Johnny?"

"I decided not to go."

Duke leaned against the wall, grinning. "Well, every coming together again gives a foretaste of the resurrection. Whew!" He glanced at the envelope he was holding as if he had just noticed it. "Now I wonder what this might be."

"You know what it is," said Johnny without rancor. "Ted Edwards' fifty bucks that he owed me. That was what gave you the idea, when he told you he'd put it in the mail. Then this Mary business came up, and I suppose it just seemed to you like a God-given opportunity."

Duke's eyes were narrow and hard. "You know about that, too, do you? What were you planning to do about it, would you tell an old friend that?"

"Nothing," said Johnny. "Just give me my I O U, and we'll call it square."

Duke fished in his pocket for the folded scrap of paper and handed it over. He peered into Johnny's eyes, looking baffled. "Well, well. You're sure, are you?"

Johnny nodded and turned to go up the stairs.

"I believe you are," said Duke. He was shaking his head, arms akimbo. "Johnny, my boy, you're a character."

Johnny looked down at him for a moment. "You're another," he said.

Note:

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Here is a new addition to the Henderson-Merril-Seabright roster of sensitive depictors of the future from a woman's viewpoint. A scholar-turned-housewife, Alice Jones began writing only recently; and though her sole previous published work was a forgotten Ph.D. thesis, she started selling at once, not only to science fiction magazines but also to major slicks. I think you'll remember for a long time her F&SF debut, with this sympathetic and moving picture of a domestic tragedy which God grant may never befall us.

Created He Them

by ALICE ELEANOR JONES

ANN CROTHERS LOOKED AT THE clock and frowned and turned the fire lower under the bacon. She had already poured his coffee; he liked it cooled to a certain degree; but if he did not get up soon it would be too cool and the bacon too crisp and he would be angry and sulk the rest of the day. She had better call him.

She walked to the foot of the stairs, a blond woman nearing thirty, big but not fat, and rather plain, with a tired sad face. She called, "Henry! Are you up?" She had calculated to a decibel how loud her voice must be. If it were too soft he did not hear and maintained that she had not called him, and was angry later; if it were too loud he was angry immediately and stayed in bed longer, to punish her, and then he grew angrier because breakfast was spoiled.

"All *right!* Pipe down, can't you?"

She listened a minute. She thought it was a normal response, but perhaps her voice had been a shade too loud. No, he was getting up. She heard the thump of his feet on the floor. She went back to the kitchen and took his orange juice and his prunes out of the icebox, and got out his bread but did not begin to toast it yet, and opened a glass of jelly.

She frowned. Grape. He did not like grape, but the co-op had been out of apple, and she had been lucky to get anything. He would not be pleased.

She sat down briefly at the table to wait for him and glanced at the clock. Ten five. Wearily, she leaned forward and rested her forehead on the back of her hand. She was not feeling well this morning and had eaten no breakfast. She was almost sure she was pregnant again.

She thought of the children.

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There were only two at home, and they had been bathed and fed long ago and put down in the basement playpen so that the noise they made would not disturb their father. She would have time for a quick look at them before Henry came down. And the house was chilly; she would have to look at the heater.

They were playing quietly with the rag doll she had made, and the battered rubber ball. Lennie, who was two and a half, was far too big for a playpen, but he was a good child, considerate, and allowed himself to be put there for short periods and did not climb out. He seemed to feel a responsibility for his brother. Robbie was fourteen months old and a small terror, but he loved Lennie, and even, Ann thought, tried to mind him.

As Ann poked her head over the bannister, both children turned and gave her radiant smiles. Lennie said, "Hi, Mommy," and Robbie said experimentally, "Ma?"

She went down quickly and gave each of them a hug and said, "You're good boys. You can come upstairs and play soon." She felt their hands. The basement was damp, but the small mended sweaters were warm enough.

She looked at the feeble fire and rattled the grate hopefully and put on more coal. There was plenty of coal in the bin, but it was inferior grade, filled with slate, and did not burn well. It was not an efficient heater, either. It was old, second-hand, but they had been lucky to get it. The useless oil heater stood in the corner.

The children chuckled at the fire, and Robbie reached out his hands toward it. Lennie said gravely, "No, no, bad."

Ann heard Henry coming downstairs, and she raced up the cellar steps and beat him to the kitchen by two seconds. When he came in she was draining the bacon. She put a slice of bread on the long fork and began to toast it over the gas flame. The gas, at least, was fairly dependable, and the water. The electricity was not working again. It seemed such a long time since the electricity had always worked. Well, it was a long time. Ten years.

Henry sat down at the table and looked peevishly at his orange juice. He was not a tall man, not quite so tall as his wife, and he walked and sat tall, making the most of every inch. He was inclined to be chubby, and he had a roll of fat under his chin and at the back of his neck, and a little bulge at the waist. His face might have been handsome, but the expression spoiled it — discontented, bad-tempered. He said, "You didn't strain the orange juice."

"Yes, I strained it." She was intent on the toast.

He drank the orange juice without enjoyment and said, "I have a touch of liver this morning. Can't think what it could be." His face brightened. "I told you that sauce was too greasy. That was it."

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She did not answer. She brought over his plate with the bacon on it and the toast, nicely browned, and put margarine on the toast for him.

He was eating the prunes. He stopped and looked at the bacon. "No eggs?"

"They were all out."

His face flushed a little. "Then why'd you cook bacon? You know I can't eat bacon without eggs." He was working himself up into a passion. "If I weren't such an easy-going man — ! And the prunes are hard — you didn't cook them long enough — and the coffee's cold, and the toast's burnt, and where's the apple jelly?"

"They didn't have any."

He laughed scornfully. "I bet they didn't. I bet you fooled around the house and didn't even get there till everything was gone." He flung down his fork. "This garbage! — why should you care, you don't have to eat it!"

She looked at him. "Shall I make you something else?"

He laughed again. "You'd ruin it. Never mind." He slammed out of the kitchen and went upstairs to sulk in the bathroom for an hour.

Ann sat down at the table. All that bacon, and it was hard to get. Well, the children would like it. She ought to clear the table and wash the dishes, but she sat still and took out a cigarette. She ought to save it, her ration was only three a day, but she lit it.

The children were getting a little noisier. Perhaps she could take them out for a while, till Henry went to work. It was cold but clear; she could bundle them up.

The cigarette was making her lightheaded, and she stubbed it out and put the butt in the box she kept over the sink. She said softly, "I hate him. I wish he would die."

She dressed the children — their snowsuits were faded and patched from much use, but they were clean and warm — and put them in the battered carriage, looping her old string shopping bag over the handle, and took them out. They were delighted with themselves and with her. They loved the outdoors. Robbie bounced and drooled and made noises, and Lennie sat quiet, his little face smiling and content.

Ann wheeled them slowly down the walk, detouring around the broken places. It was a fine day, crisp, much too cold for September, but the seasons were not entirely reliable any more. There were no other baby carriages out; there were no children at all; the street was very quiet. There were no cars. Only the highest officials had cars, and no high officials lived in this neighborhood.

The children were enchanted by the street. Shabby as it was, with the broken houses as neatly mended as they could be, and the broken paving that the patches never caught up with, it was beautiful to them. Lennie said, "Hi, Mommy," and Robbie bounced.

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The women were beginning to come, as they always came, timidly out of the drab houses, to look at the children, and Ann walked straighter and tried not to smile. It was not kind to smile, but sometimes she could not help it. Suddenly she was not tired any more, and her clothes were not shabby, and her face was not plain.

The first woman said, "Please stop a minute," and Ann stopped, and the women gathered around the carriage silently and looked. Their faces were hungry and seeking, and a few had tears in their eyes.

The first woman asked, "Do they stay well?"

Ann said, "Pretty well. They both had colds last week," and murmurs of commiseration went around the circle.

Another woman said, "I noticed you didn't come out, and I wondered. I almost knocked at your door to inquire, but then —" She stopped and blushed violently, and the others considerately looked away from her, ignoring her blunder. One did not call on one's neighbors; one lived to oneself.

The first woman said wistfully, "If I could hold them — either of them — I have dates; my cousin sent them all the way from California."

Ann blushed, too. She disliked this part of it very much, but things were so hard to get now, and Henry was difficult about what he liked to eat, though he denied that. He would say, "I'd eat anything, if you could only learn to cook it right, but you can't." Henry liked dates. Ann said, "Well . . ."

Another woman said eagerly, "I have eggs. I could spare you three." One for each of the boys and one for Henry.

"Oranges — for the children."

"And I have butter — imagine, butter!"

"Sugar — all children like sugar. Best grade — no sand in it."

"And I have tea." Henry does not like tea. But you shall hold the children anyway.

Somebody said, "Cigarettes," and somebody else whispered, "I even have *sleeping pills!*"

The children were passed around and fondled and caressed. Robbie enjoyed it and flirted with everybody, under his long eyelashes, but Lennie regarded the entire transaction with distaste.

When the children began to grow restless Ann put them back into the carriage and walked on. Her shopping bag was full.

The women went slowly back into their houses, all but one, a stranger. She must have moved into the neighborhood recently, perhaps from one of the spreading waste places. They were coming in, the people, as if they had been called, moving in closer, a little closer every year.

The woman was tall and older than Ann, with a worn plain face. She kept pace with the carriage and

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looked at the children and said, "Forgive me, I know it is bad form, but are they — do you have more?"

Ann said proudly, "I have had seven."

The woman looked at her and whispered, "Seven! And were they all — surely they were not *all* —"

Ann said more proudly still. "All. Every one."

The woman looked as if she might cry and said, "But seven! And the rest, are they —"

Ann's face clouded. "Yes, at the Center. One of my boys and all my girls. When Lennie goes, Robbie will miss him. Lennie missed Kate so, until he forgot her."

The woman said in a broken voice, "I had three, and none of them was — *none!*" She thrust something into Ann's shopping bag and said, "For the children," and walked quickly away.

Ann looked, and it was a Hershey bar. The co-op had not had chocolate for over two years. Neither of the boys had ever tasted it.

She brought the children home after a while and gave them their lunch — Henry's bacon crumbled into two scrambled eggs, and bread and butter and milk. She had been lucky at the co-op yesterday; they had had milk. She made herself a cup of coffee, feeling extravagant, and ate a piece of toast, and smoked the butt of this morning's cigarette.

For dessert she gave them each an orange; the rest she saved for Henry. She got out the Hershey bar and gave them all of it; Henry should not have their chocolate! The Hershey bar was hard and pale, as stale chocolate gets, and she had to make sawing motions with the knife to divide it evenly. The boys were enchanted. Robbie chewed his half and swallowed it quickly, but Lennie sucked blissfully and made it last, and then took pity on his brother and let Robbie suck, too. Ann did not interfere. Germs, little hearts, are the least of what I fear for you.

While the children took their naps she straightened the house a little and tinkered with the heater and cleaned all the kerosene lamps. She had time to take a bath, and enjoyed it, though the laundry soap she had to use was harsh against her skin. She even washed her hair, pretty hair, long and fine, and put on one of the few dresses that was not mended.

The children slept longer than usual. The fresh air had done them good. Just at dusk the electric lights came on for the first time in three days, and she woke them up to see them — they loved the electric lights. She gave them each a piece of bread and butter and took them with her to the basement and put them in the playpen. She was able to run a full load of clothes through the old washing machine before the current went off again. The children loved the washing machine and watched it, fascinated by the whirling clothes in the little window.

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Afterward she took them upstairs again and tried to use the vacuum cleaner, but the machine was old and balky and by the time she had coaxed it to work the current was gone.

She gave the children their supper and played with them a while and put them to bed. Henry was still at the laboratory. He left late in the morning, but sometimes he had to stay late at night. The children were asleep before he came home, and Ann was glad. Sometimes they got on his nerves and he swore at them.

She turned the oven low to keep dinner hot and went into the living room. She sat beside the lamp and mended Robbie's shirt and Lennie's overalls. She turned on the battery radio to the one station that was broadcasting these days, the one at the Center. The news report was the usual thing. The Director was in good health and bearing the burden of his duties with fortitude. Conditions throughout the country were normal. Crops had not been quite so good as hoped, but there was no cause for alarm. Quotas in light and heavy industry were good — Ann smiled wryly — but could be improved if every worker did his duty. Road repairs were picking up — Ann wondered when they would get around to the street again — and electrical service was normal, except for a few scattered areas where there might be small temporary difficulties. The lamp had begun to smoke again, and Ann turned it lower. The stock market had closed irregular, with rails down an average of two points and stocks off three.

And now — the newscaster's voice grew solemn — there was news of grave import. The Director had asked him to talk seriously to all citizens about the dangers of rumormongering. Did they not realize what harm could be done by it? For example, the rumor that the Western Reservoir was contaminated. That was entirely false, of course, and the malicious and irresponsible persons who had started it would be severely dealt with.

The wastelands were not spreading, either. Some other malicious and irresponsible persons had started that rumor, and would be dealt with. The wastelands were under control. They were *not* spreading, repeat, *not*. Certain areas were being evacuated, it was true, but the measure was only temporary.

Calling them in, are you, calling them in!

The weather was normal. The seasons were definitely not changing, and here were the statistics to prove it. In 1961 . . . and in '62 . . . and that was *before*, so you see . . .

The newscaster's voice changed, growing less grave. And now for news of the children. Ann put down her mending and listened, not breathing. They always closed with news of the children, and it was always reassuring. If any child were ever unhappy, or were taken ill, or

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died, nobody knew it. One was never told anything, and of course one never saw the children again. It would upset them, one quite understood that.

The children, the newscaster said, were all well and happy. They had good beds and warm clothes and the best food and plenty of it. They even had cod-liver oil twice a week whether they needed it or not. They had toys and games, carefully supervised according to their age groups, and they were being educated by the best teachers. The children were all well and happy, repeat, *well and happy*. Ann hoped it was true.

They played the national anthem and went off the air, and just then Henry came in. He looked pale and tired — he did work hard — and his greeting was, "I suppose dinner's spoiled."

She looked up. "No, I don't think so."

She served it and they ate silently except for Henry's complaints about the food and his liver. He looked at the dates and said, "They're small. You let them stick you with anything," but she thought he enjoyed them because he ate them all.

Afterward he grew almost mellow. He lit a cigarette and told her about his day, while she washed the dishes. Henry's job at the laboratory was a responsible one, and Ann was sure he did it well. Henry was not stupid. But Henry could not get along with anybody. He said that he himself was very easy to get along with, but they were all against him. Today he had had a dispute with one of his superiors and reported that he had told the old —— where to go.

He said with gloomy relish, "They'll probably fire me, and we'll all be out in the street. Then you'll find out what it's like to live on Subsistence. You won't be able to throw my money around the way you do now."

Ann rinsed out the dish towel and hung it over the rack to dry. She said, "They won't fire you. They never do."

He laughed. "I'm good and they know it. I do twice as much work as anybody else."

Ann thought that was probably true. She turned away from the sink and said, "Henry, I think I'm pregnant."

He looked at her and frowned. "Are you sure?"

"I said I *think*. But I'm practically sure."

He said, "Oh, God, now you'll be sick all the time, and there's no living with you when you're sick."

Ann sat down at the table and lit a cigarette. "Maybe I won't be sick."

He said darkly, "You always are. Sweet prospect!"

Ann said, "We'll get another bonus, Henry."

He brightened a little. "Say, we will, at that. I'll buy some more stock."

Ann said, "Henry, we need so many things —"

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He was immediately angry. "I said I'll buy stock! Somebody in this house has to think of the future. We can't all hide our heads in the sand and hope for the best."

She stood up, trembling. It was not a new argument. "What future? Our children — children like ours are taken away from us when they're three years old and given to the state to rear. When we're old the state will take care of us. Nobody lives well any more, except — but nobody starves. And that stock — it all goes down. Don't talk to me about the future, Henry Crothers! I want my future now."

He laughed unpleasantly. "What do you want? A car?"

She said, "I want a new washing machine and a vacuum cleaner, when the quotas come — the electricity isn't so bad. I want a new chair for the living room. I want to fix up the boys' room, paint and —"

He said brutally, "They're too little to notice. By the time they get old enough —"

She sat down again, sobbing a little. Her cigarette burned forgotten in the ashtray, and Henry thriftily stubbed it out. She said, "I know, the Center takes them. The Center takes children like ours."

"And the Center's good to them. They give them more than we could. Don't you go talking against the Center." Though a malcontent in his personal life, Henry was a staunch government man.

Ann said, "I'm not, Henry, I'm —"

He said disgustedly, "Being a woman again. Tears! Oh, God, why do women always turn them on?"

She made herself stop crying. Anger was beginning to rise in her, and that helped a good deal. "I didn't mean to start an argument. I was just telling you what we need. We do need things, Henry. Clothes —"

He looked at her. "You mean for you? Clothes would do you a lot of good, wouldn't they?"

She was stung. "I don't mean maternity clothes. I won't be needing them for —"

He laughed. "I don't mean maternity clothes either. Have you looked at yourself in a mirror lately? God, you're a big horse! I always liked little women."

She said tightly, "And I always liked tall men."

He half rose, and she thought he was going to hit her. She sat still, trembling with a fierce exhilaration, her eyes bright, color in her cheeks, a little smile on her mouth. She said softly, "I'll hit you back, I'm bigger than you are. I'll kill you!"

Suddenly Henry sat down and began to laugh. When he laughed he was quite handsome. He said in a deep chuckling voice, "You're almost pretty when you get mad enough. Your hair's pretty tonight, you must have washed it." His eyes were beginning to shine, and he reached across the table and put his hand on hers. "Ann . . . old girl . . ."

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She drew her hand away. "I'm tired. I'm going to bed."

He said good-humoredly, "Sure. I'll be right up."

She looked at him. "I said I'm tired."

"And I said I'd be right up."

If I had something in my hands I'd kill you. "I don't want to."

He scowled, and his mouth grew petulant again, and he was no longer handsome. "But *I* want to."

She stood up. All at once she felt as tired as she had told Henry she was, as tired as she had been for ten years.

I cannot kill you, Henry, or myself. I cannot even wish us dead. In this desolate, dying, bombed-out world, with its creeping wastelands and its freakish seasons, with its limping economy and its arrogant Center in the country that takes our children — children like ours; the others it destroys — we have to live, and we have to live together.

Because by some twist of providence, or radiation, or genes, we are among the tiny percentage of the people in this world who can have normal children. We hate each other, but we breed true.

She said, "Come up, Henry." I can take a sleeping pill afterward.

Come up, Henry, we have to live. Till we are all called in, or our children, or our children's children. Till there is nowhere else to go.

Survival

After we've blown ourselves to dust
And all the dooms have come to pass,
The things from space will wonder at
The endless patience of the grass.

CARLYN COFFIN

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Here we continue the project, begun with The Seventh Pullet *(F&SF, December, 1954), of rediscovering the little-known and unanthologized fantasies of the one and only Saki. This is very early Saki, printed in the* Westminster Gazette *in Edwardian days (when the sum of two francs was at least as valuable as today's dollar) and in Saki's second book,* REGINALD IN RUSSIA *(1910); but the masterly touch is in evidence already, both in his social observation and in the delicate precision of his supernatural logic.*

The Soul of Laploshka

by SAKI

LAPLOSHKA WAS ONE OF THE MEANEST men I have ever met, and quite one of the most entertaining. He said horrid things about other people in such a charming way that one forgave him for the equally horrid things he said about oneself behind one's back. Hating anything in the way of ill-natured gossip ourselves, we are always grateful to those who do it for us and do it well. And Laploshka did it really well.

Naturally Laploshka had a large circle of acquaintances, and as he exercised some care in their selection it followed that an appreciable proportion were men whose bank balances enabled them to acquiesce indulgently in his rather one-sided views on hospitality. Thus, although possessed of only moderate means, he was able to live comfortably within his income, and still more comfortably within those of various tolerantly disposed associates.

But towards the poor or to those of the same limited resources as himself his attitude was one of watchful anxiety; he seemed to be haunted by a besetting fear lest some fraction of a shilling or franc, or whatever the prevailing coinage might be, should be diverted from his pocket or service into that of a hard-up companion. A two-franc cigar would be cheerfully offered to a wealthy patron, on the principle of doing evil that good may come, but I have known him indulge in agonies of perjury rather than admit the incriminating possession of a copper coin when change was needed to tip a waiter. The coin would have been duly returned at the earliest oppor-

From "SHORT STORIES OF SAKI" (by H. H. Munro), copyright, 1930, by The Viking Press, Inc.

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tunity — he would have taken means to ensure against forgetfulness on the part of the borrower — but accidents might happen, and even the temporary estrangement from his penny or sou was a calamity to be avoided.

The knowledge of this amiable weakness offered a perpetual temptation to play upon Laploshka's fears of involuntary generosity. To offer him a lift in a cab and pretend not to have enough money to pay the fare, to fluster him with a request for a sixpence when his hand was full of silver just received in change, these were a few of the petty torments that ingenuity prompted as occasion afforded. To do justice to Laploshka's resourcefulness it must be admitted that he always emerged somehow or other from the most embarrassing dilemma without in any way compromising his reputation for saying "No." But the gods send opportunities at some time to most men, and mine came one evening when Laploshka and I were supping together in a cheap boulevard restaurant. (Except when he was the bidden guest of some one with an irreproachable income, Laploshka was wont to curb his appetite for high living; on such fortunate occasions he let it go on an easy snaffle.) At the conclusion of the meal a somewhat urgent message called me away, and without heeding my companion's agitated protest, I called back cruelly, "Pay my share; I'll settle with you tomorrow." Early on the morrow Laploshka hunted me down by instinct as I walked along a side street that I hardly ever frequented. He had the air of a man who had not slept.

"You owe me two francs from last night," was his breathless greeting.

I spoke evasively of the situation in Portugal, where more trouble seemed brewing. But Laploshka listened with the abstraction of the deaf adder, and quickly returned to the subject of the two francs.

"I'm afraid I must owe it to you," I said lightly and brutally. "I haven't a sou in the world," and I added mendaciously, "I'm going away for six months or perhaps longer."

Laploshka said nothing, but his eyes bulged a little and his cheeks took on the mottled hues of an ethnographical map of the Balkan Peninsula. That same day, at sundown, he died. "Failure of the heart's action" was the doctor's verdict; but I, who knew better, knew that he had died of grief.

There arose the problem of what to do with his two francs. To have killed Laploshka was one thing; to have kept his beloved money would have argued a callousness of feeling of which I am not capable. The ordinary solution, of giving it to the poor, would by no means fit the present situation, for nothing would have distressed the dead man more than such a misuse of his property. On the other hand, the bestowal of two francs on the rich was an operation which called for some tact. An

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easy way out of the difficulty seemed, however, to present itself the following Sunday, as I was wedged into the cosmopolitan crowd which filled the side-aisle of one of the most popular Paris churches. A collecting-bag, for "the poor of Monsieur le Curé," was buffeting its tortuous way across the seemingly impenetrable human sea, and a German in front of me, who evidently did not wish his appreciation of the magnificent music to be marred by a suggestion of payment, made audible criticisms to his companion on the claims of the said charity.

"They do not want money," he said; "they have too much money. They have no poor. They are all pampered."

If that were really the case my way seemed clear. I dropped Laploshka's two francs into the bag with a murmured blessing on the rich of Monsieur le Curé.

Some three weeks later chance had taken me to Vienna, and I sat one evening regaling myself in a humble but excellent little Gasthaus up in the Währinger quarter. The appointments were primitive, but the Schnitzel, the beer, and the cheese could not have been improved on. Good cheer brought good custom, and with the exception of one small table near the door every place was occupied. Half-way through my meal I happened to glance in the direction of that empty seat, and saw that it was no longer empty. Poring over the bill of fare with the absorbed scrutiny of one who seeks the cheapest among the cheap was Laploshka. Once he looked across at me, with a comprehensive glance at my repast, as though to say, "It is my two francs you are eating," and then looked swiftly away. Evidently the poor of Monsieur le Curé had been genuine poor. The Schnitzel turned to leather in my mouth, the beer seemed tepid; I left the Emmenthaler untasted. My one idea was to get away from the room, away from the table where *that* was seated; and as I fled I felt Laploshka's reproachful eyes watching the amount that I gave to the piccolo — out of his two francs. I lunched next day at an expensive restaurant which I felt sure that the living Laploshka would never have entered on his own account, and I hoped that the dead Laploshka would observe the same barriers. I was not mistaken, but as I came out I found him miserably studying the bill of fare stuck up on the portals. Then he slowly made his way over to a milk-hall. For the first time in my experience I missed the charm and gaiety of Vienna life.

After that, in Paris or London or wherever I happened to be, I continued to see a good deal of Laploshka. If I had a seat in a box at a theatre I was always conscious of his eyes furtively watching me from the dim recesses of the gallery. As I turned into my club on a rainy afternoon I would see him taking inadequate shelter in a doorway opposite.

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Even if I indulged in the modest luxury of a penny chair in the Park he generally confronted me from one of the free benches, never staring at me, but always elaborately conscious of my presence. My friends began to comment on my changed looks, and advised me to leave off heaps of things. I should have liked to have left off Laploshka.

On a certain Sunday — it was probably Easter, for the crush was worse than ever — I was again wedged into the crowd listening to the music in the fashionable Paris church, and again the collection-bag was buffeting its way across the human sea. An English lady behind me was making ineffectual efforts to convey a coin into the still distant bag, so I took the money at her request and helped it forward to its destination. It was a two-franc piece. A swift inspiration came to me, and I merely dropped my own sou into the bag and slid the silver coin into my pocket. I had withdrawn Laploshka's two francs from the poor, who should never have had that legacy. As I backed away from the crowd I heard a woman's voice say, "I don't believe he put my money in the bag. There are swarms of people in Paris like that!" But my mind was lighter than it had been for a long time.

The delicate mission of bestowing the retrieved sum on the deserving rich still confronted me. Again I trusted to the inspiration of accident, and again fortune favoured me. A shower drove me, two days later, into one of the historic churches on the left bank of the Seine, and there I found, peering at the old wood-carvings, the Baron R., one of the wealthiest and most shabbily dressed men in Paris. It was now or never. Putting a strong American inflection into the French which I usually talked with an unmistakable British accent, I catechized the Baron as to the date of the church's building, its dimensions, and other details which an American tourist would be certain to want to know. Having acquired such information as the Baron was able to impart on short notice, I solemnly placed the two-franc piece in his hand, with the hearty assurance that it was "pour vous," and turned to go. The Baron was slightly taken aback, but accepted the situation with a good grace. Walking over to a small box fixed in the wall, he dropped Laploshka's two francs into the slot. Over the box was the inscription, "Pour les pauvres de M. le Curé."

That evening, at the crowded corner by the Café de la Paix, I caught a fleeting glimpse of Laploshka.

He smiled, slightly raised his hat, and vanished. I never saw him again. After all, the money had been *given* to the deserving rich, and the soul of Laploshka was at peace.

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Apparently August Derleth, alone, has access only to the more straightforward criminal records of that latter-day Holmes, the Master of Praed Street, Solar Pons. For those peculiar cases which pass the bounds of normal detectival comprehension, Mr. Derleth requires the assistance, in transcribing Dr. Parker's chronicles, of Mack Reynolds. You may recall The Adventure of the Snitch in Time *(F&SF, July, 1953) in which Reynolds and Derleth told of Pons's triumph over chronokinetic art-thieves; now here is a possibly even stranger episode in the annals of Praed Street: the one case which Solar Pons occasionally wishes that he had never solved.*

The Adventure of the Ball of Nostradamus

by MACK REYNOLDS AND AUGUST DERLETH

MY FRIEND, SOLAR PONS, THE PRIvate enquiry agent, has a tendency to be highly dubious of all coincidence — but was it only coincidence that he should refer to the singular adventure of the late Abraham Weddigan on the very day that I had determined to set down the facts about this horrible affair which shocked a continent and, on its successful termination, brought Pons the profound gratitude of millions of people as well as the personal felicitations of His Majesty? From the moment of its conclusion, Pons began to entertain some doubt about Abraham Weddigan, that strange, unforgettable monster — a description of my own which Pons will not countenance — and soon his doubts grew, so that often, when I saw him sitting in profound and troubled thought, and knew no problem had come in to enlist his keen mind, I was aware that he was once again pondering the meaning of the motives of Abraham Weddigan.

On that day in the 1920's that Pons entered the case, in the second decade of our sharing his quarters at Number 7B, Praed Street, I had been reading about the murder of a child — the second in the streets of London. Pons was standing at the window, his long thin hands clasped behind his back, his eyes fastened on the street below.

"I observe that you, too, my dear

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Parker," said Pons suddenly, without turning, "have begun to wonder — not without some indignation — about the child-murderer in our midst."

"How could you know which account I was reading?" I asked in surprise.

He turned, his ascetic face briefly alight with a smile. "My dear fellow, surely it is elementary. You are agitated, you rustle your paper indignantly, you squirm your disapproval of the police methods in the case, indeed, you all but snort in irritation. What else in the morning paper could stir to such indignation a man who has always been interested in the crime life of London?"

"Ah, you have read of it then!"

"You know my habits, Parker. Little escapes me."

He came over to stuff his pipe with shag from the slipper tacked to the mantelpiece, and sat down in his favorite chair, a frown on his high forehead.

"I fear I neglected to tell you," he went on, "but I am expecting our friend Jamison at any moment. He sent word by messenger this morning before you awoke that he wished to see me on the matter, and it is now some minutes past the hour set for his arrival. Since he is customarily so prompt, I fancy some new facts may have come to light."

"Or another child murder," I put in.

"God forbid! This shocking chain of child murders is far more extensive than Inspector Jamison may know." He listened a moment and added, "But there is the police car now, if I am not mistaken, arriving in Jamison's usual haste."

The outer door opened and closed violently, and Jamison came up the stairs as rapidly as his rotund bulk would permit.

"Dear me," murmured Pons, "I would far rather Jamison glum than Jamison in such good spirits."

I opened the door to Jamison and saw that he was indeed in good spirits, for a broad smile sprang into being on his chubby face, his eyes twinkled, and his mustache fairly trembled with delight at sight of us.

"This time, Pons, we have done it without you!"

"My congratulations! But what is it you have done?"

"We have our man for the murder of Terence Allen and Tomas Kanczeny."

"The child murderer!" I cried. "I thought the crimes clueless."

"Ah, so they were," Jamison went on, rubbing his hands together. "We did not set out to arrest Captain Martin Verne for murder — we went only to question him."

"Pray begin at the beginning, Jamison," interrupted Pons patiently.

"Very well. I need not go into detail about the crimes themselves; you are familiar enough with the shocking shooting-down of two defenseless children on the city streets.

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We have been interested — remotely, it is true — in the activities of Captain Martin Verne —"

"One-time soldier of fortune, gun runner, assassin for hire, last heard of in Morocco, after some years in Nicaragua, in China, and on the Continent," said Pons.

"That's him. Well, Pons, he's our man. When he came to England three months ago, he was living close to the bone. We knew as much, and spread the word that the Yard was interested in Verne. So one day he moved from the hole he lived in out Wapping way, set himself up in Park Lane, no less, new wardrobe, and new night life — all the more expensive restaurants and theaters. A nark passed us the word, and two men went over last night to ask him some questions. Verne must have suspected they were after something else. He tried to put them off, then he tried to shoot his way out. He put a bullet into Police Constable MacEachern's shoulder, but Constable Leeds put him out with his truncheon. Leeds hit him harder than he ought to have done, and Verne died half an hour ago. But not before we got down what he said in delirium; and, when we had him conscious for a little while before the end, and put it to him: *did he kill the children?* — he admitted it. Further, the laboratory tests show that a bullet from his gun killed the Allen boy; no bullet was recovered in the case of Kanczeny. So there we are."

Pons had listened with keen interest. Now, however, his eyes darkened, his frown returned. "And the motive?"

"He had no time for that. Still, we thought it might be in what he said. You see, the moment they heard him talking, they started taking down what he said. I wasn't called in until after I'd sent word to you. One look at what they'd taken down, and I knew Verne was our man. I brought along a copy of it for you, Pons. You've done me a good many favors in the past."

He took a folded paper from his inner coat pocket as he spoke and handed it to Pons. It was hardly the size of an ordinary sheet of manuscript paper and was, as I saw when I rose and walked over to look from behind Pons, little more than a meaningless jumble of disjointed sentences. Nevertheless, Pons read it with the keenest interest, though for my part I failed to see that Verne's utterances in delirium conveyed anything of signal importance. The typescript was commendably short.

"Terence Allen, aged 9 . . . Escape tutor . . . the ball knows . . . savior o' the world . . . That damned fortune-teller! . . . two hundred gross of Brens . . . Look, sir, it's a bit out o' me line . . . first the smoke, then the picture . . . Christ! how real it is . . . Bloody old Mussolini! . . . Tomas Kanczeny, Hungarian legation, seven years old . . . mad dog, mad dog,

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mad dog . . . Gentlemen, we aims to quarantine, if you please, to prevent . . . blast him forever! putting the blood o' kids on me hands! . . . A pound never looked better to me, and that's the truth, so help me God, but I didn't bargain for that kind of blood money. . . . Guns you ordered and guns you got; I'll look at the color o' your money. . . . Touch the ball, Mister. Fifty quid to have your fortune told. Knows all, sees all, tells the future, tells the past. Fifty quid, Mister . . . My alibi's perfect. Nobody can touch me but me. . . . And if I wasn't so bad off for money, I'd never take on a dirty job like this. . . . Guns is my line, sir, guns and contraband. I'm the best."

Pons looked up, his eyes fairly dancing.

"Couldn't have made it clearer in a signed confession," said Jamison, smiling happily. "We know the Allen boy was shot when he ran away from his tutor. Now, just to corroborate, we've sent a man out to discover whether there was a dog at or near the scene, plainly enough in evidence, when the Kanczeny boy was killed."

"And how do you plan to establish the connecting link with — let us choose at random — the death of little Ossip Ciciorka in Prague four months ago?" interposed Pons quietly.

Jamison's mouth fell agape. His joviality faded; he grew wary. "Of whom?" he asked finally.

Pons repeated the name and added, "Or, for that matter, of Georges Murat, aged ten, in the Rue d'Auseil, Paris, on May ninth last year; of Giovanni d'Orsini, aged eight, on a holiday in Naples two years ago; of Timor Gushenko, aged six, on the beach of Cannes with his parents three years ago; or even of the abortive attempt on the life of Ana Rabinsohn, a girl of five, in the streets of Bucharest six years ago."

Jamison had recovered his composure. "Pons, you are joking. And an ill-conceived joke it is," said he.

"I daresay you would think so. I regret that it is no jest. I have never been more in earnest. Let us pause for a moment and examine into the matter. There are striking parallels I believe you cannot fail to apprehend. In neither the Allen nor the Kanczeny case was any attempt to kidnap made."

"No."

"Nor to collect blackmail from the parents of these unfortunate victims."

"No."

"Nor was there any molestation of the children themselves."

"No."

"In both these instances murder alone would seem to have been the object of the attack."

"Quite so. It was in all the papers."

"The pattern is precisely similar to their continental predecessors. All are unsolved crimes. And, of even greater importance, they are seem-

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ingly without motive. Or did you discover at the last hour with Verne any trace of one?"

Jamison flushed.

"Ah, you need not answer. I submit, then, that Verne had been hired to commit at least these last two crimes. He may have had a hand in some of the others, but I am inclined to doubt it. Very well then. If not Verne, some other hired assassin. They abound in Europe; each has his price, and most may have been less squeamish than Verne. I put it to you that no one pays a hired assassin to murder a child without some motive, however obscure. No, do not say it Jamison — the psychopath does not hire murder done; he does it himself. We must cast into other waters for our motive, Jamison."

"When word of Verne's death reaches whoever it was who hired him, I'll wager he'll leave London by the fastest means," said Jamison.

"Dear me, I had not thought that Scotland Yard was less intent upon the capture of a murderer than his flight beyond their jurisdiction. I fancy that concept of crime detection will interest the Commissioner."

"Oh, come, Pons, you are taking me too literally. Depend on it, we shall be on the watch for him. But, I confess, we have not the slightest hint of motive."

"I suspected as much," said Pons dryly. "But the picture is not so hopeless as all that, surely. There are several salient facts which are curiously similar in the majority of the murders."

"You believe that those you have mentioned are connected with these in London?"

"Can you doubt it? Consider: the methods in all cases are exactly similar, and so are the circumstances surrounding them. There is a sinister pattern in the very fact that there is no similarity whatsoever — unless we are unable to see it — among the victims of this plague of murder. Those children come from all walks of life. Allen was the son of a poor laborer. Kanczeny belonged to parents in the Hungarian embassy. Ciciorka was the son of a Polish librarian. Young d'Orsini, though of an ancient Italian family, was the son of an artist, Murat of a wine merchant, Gushenko of a petty railroad official. And the abortive attempt in Bucharest was made on the daughter of humble Jewish parents.

"Murder of children for vengeance against the parents is not unknown; it was practised at one time by the Maffia. But it is highly unlikely that these murders have a common origin of that nature; they are too widely separated to make it probable that one terror organization could be responsible for these crimes, and to presuppose others is to enter the realm of pure conjecture without relation to facts. None of the parents involved is important enough to have incurred political enmities. Indeed, they are nonetities — even Kanczeny's position at the

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embassy is that of a minor clerk. In almost every instance, the children were murdered at a supremely felicitous moment for the murderer — when they had strayed or run away, which suggests either a constant watchfulness or an uncanny knowledge. I venture to suggest that all these crimes were the work of one guiding genius."

"A Napoleon of crime," cried Jamison.

"You do Napoleon's memory no service. A modern Herod, perhaps." Pons made an impatient gesture. "But we are wasting time. I beg you to stand by, Jamison. I mean to find the author of these crimes."

When Jamison had gone, Pons turned to me. "If you were to need the services of a fortune-teller — surely one of position, who asks 'fifty quid' a reading — to whom in all London would you apply?"

"Elementary, my dear Pons!" I cried. "There is surely but one such seer: the consultant — so he terms himself — visited by peers, M. P.'s, even persons close to the court — Abraham Weddigan. His fees are exorbitant, and he is never at a loss for patrons."

But Pons was already looking into a London directory. "Let us see. Ah, here we are. His office is in Southampton Row. Let us lose no time. We shall start with him. If we are in error, we shall carry on from there. None knows to what lengths he may be driven now that his hireling is dead."

"Are you not taking the delirium of a dying man too seriously?" I inquired when at last we were in a cab rolling toward Southampton Row.

Pons sat in his accustomed pose, head sunk to his chest, the fingers of one hand toying with the lobe of his right ear, his eyes clouded and dark, fixed on a point not in space but in time.

"No, no," he said impatiently. "I submit that the last words of Verne, however disjointed, nevertheless pointed clearly to some baleful connection with a fortune-teller. 'That damned fortune-teller!' he said. And twice more, he made reference to 'the ball' — which surely is the crystal globe so much an integer in the impedimenta of the seer. We are quite safe in eliminating the references to guns and gun-running; these would be bound to show up in such a scattering of memories as the situation implies. I submit we are on the right track. 'Fifty quid' for a reading. No small sum. No crossing of the palm with mere silver. No indeed. 'Fifty quid' — and for that someone who knows all and sees all will tell the past and the future. Verne had become obsessed by him — and by the magic ball — to such an extent that a rudimentary conscience made him try to flee when, in actuality, none pursued him, and so brought him to his death."

Abraham Weddigan's suite of offices was in one of the most modern buildings on Southampton Row, one given over to business offices repre-

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senting some of the foremost industries in all England. There, as sedate as any other, Abraham Weddigan was duly listed as a *Consultant*, and his suite was no secret.

We mounted to his floor, found his number, and were prepared to knock when the door was opened noiselessly from within. There before us stood a Caucasian of dark complexion, a Mauritanian, surely. He wore a turban and complementary clothing. He bowed.

"Mr. Solar Pons and Dr. Lyndon Parker. Step this way, if you please, sirs. The Master is expecting you."

"We made no appointment," I said with asperity.

"The Master knows all save his own fate," said the Mauritanian. "Such is as it was ordained."

He led us down a short corridor to a wide door at its end. There he stood, his head bowed, making no sound.

Nevertheless, a voice from within called out, "Enter."

The Mauritanian threw open the door and stood aside for us to enter a large, almost unfurnished room. In its center was a low divan; opposite it, a conventional but luxurious easy chair. Between chair and divan rose a small round table of oriental manufacture, supporting a small crystal ball. The occupant of the chair came to his feet and motioned to the divan.

"Mr. Pons, Doctor Parker — pray be seated."

His hands were fine and soft, as delicate as a woman's; his eyes were deep and lustrous; his gray hair was heavy and worn long, the only factor of his appearance that seemed affected, for his dress was conventional — a gray business suit. He was a compelling, extraordinarily handsome man, however old he might have been. As he resumed his seat, Pons and I sat on the divan.

"We came . . ." began Pons, but Weddigan held up his hand for silence.

"I regret the nature of your call. I regret the circumstances which have brought it about. The children, yes. The crystal told me Verne was not efficient. Now he is dead before my work in London is finished. Shall I go elsewhere to pursue it? I cannot say; the crystal is dark, very dark."

"Do you now confess to having compelled the man Verne to murder two defenseless children?" I demanded.

"Gently, gently, Parker," admonished Pons, laying a restraining hand on my arm. "We shall listen to Mr. Weddigan."

Weddigan inclined his head. "Thank you, Mr. Pons. Fate has implacably determined that we must be opposed to each other. I regret that circumstance. I know you will hinder my plans. How shall I speak of them to you?" An expression of great weariness came into his face, and he shook his head slowly from side to side. "Have I any other course? I think not, gentlemen. I hope and pray that you are not of

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the race of doubters and the army of the Philistines. I have the gift of true precognition." He laid one hand on the crystal ball before him. "All the myths of mankind, gentlemen, have a root, however remote, in fact — even the dream of seeing man's future in a crystal ball. This is no ordinary crystal, believe me. It is old, very old — it and the strangely wrought base of silver on which it stands. The inscriptions are in Sumerian cuneiform characters. It was ancient before the city of Ur. Of its origin I have no knowledge, but many years ago, in the year 1550, a traveler from Greece, who had found this crystal in the ruins of Delphi, sold it to a Frenchman named Michel de Nostredame."

"The crystal ball of Nostradamus," murmured Pons.

"At least *he* is not strange to you, Mr. Pons. And was not Nostradamus the most famous seer of all time? Did not his prophecies, one upon another, come true — centuries after he had set them down?"

"The fulfillment of prophecies, like beauty, is too often only in the eye of the beholder," replied Pons. "But I concede that the French physician offers as nearly adequate evidence for prevision as I know."

"This is the original crystal ball and from it stems the information you seek. It was because of what I saw in the future that it became necessary for me to serve my race by destroying the young persons in whom you are interested."

"You wish us to believe that you hired assassins — Verne in London, others elsewhere — to murder harmless children because of what you saw in the ball of Nostradamus?" asked Pons, shaking his head gently. "Sir, I am no seer; I am but an humble practitioner of the art of ratiocination. This is beyond reason."

"Indeed it is," agreed Weddigan. "I repeat it. These children, Ossip Ciciorka, Terence Allen, Timor Gushenko — but I need not name them; you know their names — these children, I say, were destined to become the oppressors, the dictators, the mad dogs of tomorrow, the Mussolinis of their generation, to fire the earth with war and pestilence, to subjugate and degrade mankind to its lowest level. I failed in the case of the girl, Ana Rabinsohn; perhaps I shall have opportunity to try again. There is but one more in London — Josef Zollern. With your permission, I shall personally execute him."

"I regret our inability to aid your crime, Mr. Weddigan," said Pons.

"Stay a moment, sir. Will you look into the ball? Pray have no fear of chicanery. And you, Dr. Parker. And tell me in a moment or two what you see there."

Pons and I turned to the ball. And in a moment, scarcely more, the crystal had begun to cloud up, as if smoke had somehow entered the glass. I flashed a glance at our monstrous host, and saw him bent above the ball, his hands flat on

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either side of it, his head bowed, an expression of infinite sadness in his features. Then the ball drew me again, and I saw a scene beginning to take shape, as of a vast concourse of people, before whom stood a fair-haired young man wearing a scarlet tunic, haranguing them passionately and receiving their ovations. The impassioned orator bore a sabre-slash on his right cheek. All about hung the paraphernalia of tyranny. The scene held but briefly; then the clouds swirled up and it was gone.

"I know only too well what you saw, gentlemen," said Weddigan. He rose, clapping his hands.

The Mauritanian appeared almost instantly.

"Forgive me," said Weddigan, bowing once more, his eyes fixed upon some goal far beyond us. "I am an idealist, a perfectionist. I wear a curse upon my soul." And to the servant he said, "Detain Mr. Pons and Dr. Parker for twenty minutes. I leave to protect the future."

The seer stepped behind the servant and vanished into the dark hangings along the wall. The Mauritanian resolutely barred our way, standing with folded arms before us, his sudden menace seeming to make of him a giant. And indeed, his shoulders were as broad as any I have seen, and his girth was in keeping. He weighed well over fifteen stone, and his aspect was formidable.

Neither of us made a move for several moments. Then suddenly Pons reached out, took up the crystal ball of Nostradamus, and at the same time came to his feet and flung the ball with all his might. The surprised Mauritanian fell without a cry, and the ball shattered when it struck the floor beyond the divan.

Pons leaped over the fallen servant and, without turning to see whether I was following, ran out into the hall to the elevators. In the foyer he found what he sought — a telephone directory of London.

"There is but one chance we may save the boy, Parker," he said. "Twenty minutes, Weddigan said. Let us just see . . . *Z . . . Zollern.* Clapham, Loughborough, Norwood — these Zollerns are well over twenty minutes from Southampton Row. Camden Town. Count Helmut von and zu Zollern — he alone is within twenty minutes of these premises. Now, if only we can reach Jamison in time . . ."

We sped toward Camden Town in a fortuitously discovered cab, and turned into a middle-class residential street just as the tall figure of Abraham Weddigan passed the flats housing the Zollern family we sought.

"Slow down, driver," said Pons.

Weddigan, having reached the end of the street, turned to walk back.

At that moment a small figure emerged from the flats and started across the street. At sight of him,

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Weddigan changed his pace to swerve toward the boy.

"Now!" cried Pons. "Pray heaven we are not too late! Driver, get down there at once."

Just as the driver started up, a Flying Squad car raced around the further corner and bore down upon Weddigan. The white face of Abraham Weddigan came up, his eyes widening as he saw the two cars coming toward him. His hand darted into his coat and brought out a stub-nosed pistol. He began to run toward the eleven-year-old.

The bulky figure of Inspector Jamison leaned from the window of the police car, heavy Webley in hand. Within the second it spoke sharply, once and again. Weddigan spun around and dropped to the street, his weapon skittering from his hand.

Pons, myself, and Jamison were out of our respective vehicles in a moment. We ran forward, while young Josef Zollern, who had turned at the excitement to look back, began to walk toward Weddigan's body. The four of us reached the scene almost together.

"Done in," said Jamison curtly. "Acting on your information, Pons. We've traced some of Verne's payments to Weddigan. A madman."

"It would seem so," replied Pons, gazing thoughtfully down at the fallen body. "Even if I find it difficult to forget how he spoke of Mussolini. There are more important things in government than making the trains run on time. . . ."

Josef Zollern, a pale, pinch-faced youngster, looked down at the corpse almost with contempt. Momentarily, a fire seemed to flash in the depths of his dark eyes.

"Young man, you were in danger," said Jamison with bluff heartiness.

The boy's lips were touched with disdain.

"I suppose that before my destiny is fulfilled, I shall see a good deal of this," he said shrilly. There was a cutting edge of fanaticism in his voice.

Pons gazed at him as if he had seen him for the first time.

The boy looked back with eyes that were proud and insolent. Then he turned and walked, quite self-possessed, back to the apartment house from which tenants were coming toward the scene.

Happily, that was the end of the inexplicable sequence of child murders which had shocked the Continent. With Weddigan's death, the case was closed, and so it is marked in the police files, despite Pons's annoying, "Only the future will tell, Parker."

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In which Miss Smith turns from satire and fantasy to a straightforward story of the future, with a different view of the theme of an invaded Earth, at once bitter and tenderly poignant.

The Faithful Friend

by EVELYN E. SMITH

"NICE LITTLE PLACE YOU HAVE HERE, sir," Krayn projected, allowing the fumes from his inhaler to lap luxuriously about his sensibilities. He wasn't just flattering the old fellow; it *was* a pleasant spot in spite of its obvious alienness — or perhaps because of it. The atmosphere was excellent, eminently breathable; the scenery piquantly attractive. It was a pity that the planet was too far off the main galactic routes to appeal to the tourist trade, and so devoid of any distinctive commodities that could not be more profitably imported from worlds closer to the Home Planet that its development would be economically unsound.

Pity too that Krayn's first assignment should be to a colony of only scenic interest, for this might well be his permanent post. The Governor was old and Krayn was young and well-connected.

But the view was quaint and charming, and the young diplomat realized that he might as well relax and enjoy it. Foliage cropped so short it resembled a floor cloth contrasted strikingly with the tall plants that thrust upward from the forest. He must remember to have some photocubes made to send back home. And, beyond the forest, even higher, rose the hills. It was from the hills that the unpleasant sounds were coming, sounds which had been impinging ruthlessly and insistently upon Krayn's consciousness, hard as he tried to exclude them. But primitive places tended to sound bad — that was one of the disadvantages of a career in the Colonial Service.

"You wouldn't have thought it was nice when I first came here, fifty *zitarn* ago," Gorys replied. "At that time the natives were engaged in ferocious intertribal warfare, killing each other without mercy and sterilizing the land with their weapons. We put a stop to it, of course."

"Naturally," Krayn agreed, inhaling again. "A sterile land produces nothing. However, it seems fertile enough now."

"It took a long time for the green

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to come, however," Gorys told him. "For the natives it took several lifetimes. They are extremely short-lived, as you undoubtedly learned in your indoctrination courses; fifteen *zi'tarn* would be a long span for one."

"The green color of the foliage is a result of mutation, then?" the younger one asked languidly.

"No. That, so far as I can make out, seems to be the ordinary color. At first it seemed a refreshing change, but by now I long to see a purple leaf again." Gorys sighed. "I suppose I never shall. I'm too old to take the hyperdrive — I shall die here. Only my ashes will ever return to the Home Planet."

The old one's nostalgia awakened no sympathy in Krayn, for he had just come from home and the green foliage of this new world was still strange and delightful. So he changed the subject, unhappily conscious that he did so with dexterity insufficient for even a budding diplomat. If only he had been a more assiduous student during the indoctrination period!

"What did you do about the natives, then? Obviously they couldn't be left to continue their destructive careers unchecked; yet it would have been cruel to annihilate them all." After the thought was out, he realized that he'd been insufferably pompous — as if he'd been reciting before an examiner.

"My *dear* fellow!" Gorys raised a quizzical antenna. "What a *brutal* idea!" Krayn palpitated with embarrassment. His senior, always the perfect diplomat, kindly pretended not to notice — which made it even worse. "No," Gorys went on, "like most life forms of limited intelligence they proved to be quite tractable individually, and we managed to tame a good many of them. A few escaped. The others we were forced to destroy — quite painlessly, of course."

"But what do you use the tame ones for, sir?" Krayn asked. That was a safe, objective question.

"As a matter of fact, Krayn, I'm rather proud of what I've done with them. They've proved to be extremely gentle and affectionate. They make excellent pets and can even be taught to perform simple household duties. One of the reasons that this planet can be administered so economically is that we use native labor for much of the basic routine work."

"Amazing!" Krayn commented dutifully. "But they wouldn't be of much use, I suppose, if the Home Government decided to throw the planet open for colonization?"

"No," Gorys replied shortly. "But they're highly unlikely to do that — it wouldn't pay."

And you wouldn't want it done, Krayn thought on a sublevel, *even if it did. You want everything kept "quaint" and "unspoiled." It's old reactionaries like you who stand in the way of progress.*

Gorys' color seemed to change with displeasure. But he couldn't, of course, have penetrated Krayn's

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mind shield; absurd to think so. Besides, he went on hospitably, as if Krayn had thought nothing: "I have a tame man here; haven't you noticed him? He's a bright little fellow — aren't you, George?"

The man who, Krayn now observed, had been renewing the chemicals in the inhalers, looked up and widened his oral aperture.

"They do that to express pleasure," Gorys explained, projecting affection toward the man, whose small, solid body writhed in an ecstasy of delight. "They're almost devoid of telepathic powers. They can understand a few basic conceptions, such as their own names and simple orders, but they apparently cannot project at all. I've tried to teach one or two of the more alert ones and failed."

"Amazing, anyway!" Krayn marveled. "The term *George* would be a native apellation, I suppose. Then they *are* able to communicate with each other in some way? By gestures, perhaps?"

"Yes, indeed they can communicate with one another!" Gorys iridesced with enthusiasm. At last he was on the right track, Krayn thought with relief; get the old one to expand upon his favorite subjects — that gambit never failed to please virtually any form of intelligent life. "They have a cruder method of communication than gestures, however. I'm afraid they use — well — sound. Unpleasant, of course, but you can't expect them to know any better. And it's much more adequate than you might think; they can even get some elementary abstractions across to each other."

He inhaled sensuously. "You know — you'll probably ridicule me for this — but I do think they have an exceptional degree of intelligence for a lower life form. Watch them and see for yourself."

Krayn repressed a quiver of amusement. The Governor was getting old indeed. Which was just as well, from his own viewpoint.

"I know they are certainly capable of affection," Gorys went on earnestly. "And not necessarily to their own species. George is devoted to me. He'd do anything for my sake."

"I'm sure he would, sir, but, after all, what could a *native* possibly do for you?" Krayn asked with almost obvious contempt. *The old dotard!* he thought. *Treating an animal as if it were a rational being! Reading his own emotions into it!*

Suddenly the man whirled toward Krayn and made sounds that were as unpleasant as they were menacing. Krayn shrank back. It was Gorys' turn to quiver with amusement. "You see, Krayn, my point is proved. They do have some intelligence. Perhaps he didn't understand exactly what you were projecting, but he sensed that you were questioning his devotion. I shouldn't be surprised if George is a trifle jealous of you too; thinks you're a new pet." Again he caressed the man gently with his mind. *Disgusting!*

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"I suppose you understood the noises it made," Krayn ideated bitterly, injured pride at having let himself obviously be frightened by a native overcoming the deference due a superior.

There was a pause while Gorys thought to himself on a level his junior was unable to penetrate. "After all," the old one finally projected, "George has served me for a long time. I got him when he was just a cub. We've grown to understand each other, he and I — emotionally if not intellectually. And I daresay I have picked up the meaning of a few of his sounds.

"That's what happens when one grows old and alone in a foreign world," he continued, almost as if — alarming thought! — he had been able to touch Krayn's carefully shielded mind. "One becomes attached to one's pets — excessively attached, perhaps; I am willing to grant you that. Sometimes I even wonder whether men may not, after all, have souls. A foolish conceit of mine, of course, but you must expect foolishness from one so old as I."

Not being able to think of a reply — rather, not being able to think of an acceptable reply — Krayn inhaled again as slowly as he could. You had to hand this to the old fellow: his projections might be boring, but he had only the very best chemicals in his inhalers. It must have cost a tidy sum to have them fetched across the Galaxy.

Krayn wondered, not for the first time, just what a Governor's salary was. Of course there were always perquisites, but Gorys was just fool enough not to take advantage of them.

"Be careful," Gorys warned him. "One grows to depend too much upon the inhaler in the Colonies. I've seen many a promising young diplomat ruined that way. There is so little to do here . . . not much in the way of work, still less in the way of recreation. Quite enough for an old one like me, but, I realize, dull for the young."

Officious old fool! Krayn thought behind his shield and then, in alarm: *Does that mean he has taken a dislike to me, wants to get rid of me — already?* He wouldn't have chosen this planet himself, but it would certainly make a black mark on his record if his superior asked to have him transferred elsewhere. No amount of influence would compensate for that. He *must* try to please.

The man opened his oral aperture and made sounds again, sounds directed toward Gorys. Although disturbing, these were apparently not intended as hostile. *How can the old one stand it?* Krayn wondered in an agony of discomfort. The Governor seemed to comprehend the symbolism of the noises more efficiently than he had admitted. A rather shocking hobby! "No, George," he projected, apparently unaffected by the noise, "I will not need you again. You may go."

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It went just as if it had understood. Perhaps Gorys was not altogether senile; the men did have some comprehension. "Why haven't such intelligent pets been exported to the other planets, sir? They could command good prices. You could really develop this planet then, make it fit for colonization."

He had erred again, although he had thought to please. The Governor went rigid with anger. Then he relaxed himself deliberately. "Of course it's foolish for me to expect you to understand right away, Krayn. You don't know men as I do. They aren't exported because I have expressly forbidden it. Away from their own planet they would be exploited — mistreated perhaps — for there would be no laws to cover them. I want to protect them; I've grown rather fond of the little fellows."

"They are your children," Krayn couldn't help projecting, for the Governor had rudely smashed a daydream that was none the less dear for being so very young.

"You might say that." Gorys accepted the idea as a piece of whimsy. Which was just as well.

The neurotic old fool, Krayn thought. *When he dies, I shall be Governor. I have influential relatives back on the Home Planet, and nobody else who could pull any strings would think of choosing this place. I can make a good profit out of exporting these animals — and put this planet on the map.*

"What's more," Gorys put in suddenly, "they could be very dangerous if they were not handled in the proper way."

Krayn began to wonder about his mind shield again. Anyone who couldn't keep his shield up would never get anywhere in the Colonial Service. Or was it just coincidence that, on occasion, Gorys seemed to be reading his inmost thoughts? It must be coincidence. One who could penetrate mind shields would hardly content himself with the governorship of a back water like this planet. Although, from what Krayn had heard, in his youth Gorys had held some of the most important posts in the Service. Perhaps this was his way of retiring. Krayn must remember not to underestimate his superior.

"Have you become aware of the noises from the hills?" Gorys went on.

Krayn palpitated with embarrassment again. You could hardly tell your host that you sensed offensive noises in his living place, even when he brought up the subject himself. It was extremely bad taste on Gorys' part to thrust him into such a difficult situation. "I — I have been somewhat conscious of them," the younger one replied uneasily. "But they haven't bothered me. I daresay in time one could come to like them."

"Nonsense! You must learn, Krayn, the difference between being polite and being ridiculous. The noises are abominable, especially so

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because there's going to be a full moon tonight. Men always seem to be more restless when there's a full moon. . . . You remember I mentioned to you that some of the untamed natives did escape?"

"Yes," Krayn replied, too much interested to be resentful. "You mean they're still alive? Their descendants, that is," he corrected himself.

"Indeed they are. The original ones escaped into the hills. At the time we didn't think it mattered, so we made very little effort to pursue them. We were wrong — but how were we to realize then how singularly fecund these creatures were?"

"They procreated?"

"They did. And under the most impossible-seeming conditions. Individually they are weak, but the species is tough and resilient. Now there are quite a number of wild ones roving in packs in the highlands. Every now and then we arrange a hunt, more to relieve the monotony than for any other reason. They're really not worth the trouble of wholesale extermination: doing that would spoil the landscape again. I've grown rather attached to the view."

He looked thoughtfully at his junior. "Artists who have come out here to work — those fellows will travel to the end of the Galaxy to find something new in sunsets — have praised its beauty highly, so you can see I am not just offering you the opinion of one old fogy."

Krayn took little interest in esthetic viewpoints, and he was too much startled by the information to speculate on whether his inner mind were being read again. "Do they do much damage — the wild ones?"

Gorys shrugged a palpus. "They steal such of our nutriment as they find palatable — sometimes kill a careless sentry. But, after all, we are living on an outpost; such things are to be expected. On other planets there are life forms far more dangerous and far less amusing. . . . Oh, if the men got really troublesome, I expect we would have to clear them out!"

He quivered in amusement. "They have some sort of group sense. I suspect George of giving food to stray wild ones occasionally. But I have not reproached him; after all, he must desire the companionship of his own kind now and again. I can't blame him; it's hard to have just enough intelligence to know that to me, fond as I am of him, he is only a pet. . . ."

"But that's all he *is*, sir," Krayn protested, shocked at such almost criminal negligence. "A pet — an animal. It could be dangerous —his consorting with his own species. If they have enough intelligence to hunt in packs, to communicate, they might persuade him to turn against you."

"George will never turn against me," Gorys replied confidently. "I'm sorry if I've alarmed you. There's really no danger."

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"I'm not alarmed, sir" — Krayn projected hauteur — "I was thinking only of your welfare."

"When one is as old as I, Krayn, his welfare becomes purely an academic question." Gorys floated laboriously off his platform. "I do think it's time we turned in, don't you? I'll show you to your quarters — no use disturbing George. I have no servants, you know; they would be merely an ostentation, since the living place actually runs itself. I have simple tastes. And I do dislike employing my fellows for menial duties."

Bah! Krayn thought. *Self-conscious idealist! No wonder you got stuck with this planet.*

"I trust you'll find your room reasonably comfortable. It's sound-proofed so the hill noises won't come to you. . . . Good night, Krayn, rest well."

II

Late that night, when the moon was high, the manpack crept down from the hills into the valley. They were silent, because they were on the hunt; and they were a hundred strong because they were after big game — very big game. Where they were not covered by scraps of cloth, their hides gleamed smooth and pale in the moonlight, like polished stone. In their limbs they carried sticks — some long and some short — that would expel projectiles with a degree of force and could sometimes, if used with sufficient accuracy, kill — Gorys' kind as well as their own species and the other species native to the planet. Without the sticks, they would have been no trouble at all to the Colonial Administration, since they were without other defenses.

The sticks were old, for they had been handed down from the men's forefathers. The men themselves had long since lost the art of making sticks that killed, or at least the facilities for doing so. But they knew how to release the limited magic that lay within them, and so they tended these weapons carefully.

The men moved cautiously through the underbrush, making as little noise as they could, although they knew the living place was completely sound-conditioned. They knew a good deal about the living space, for they had communicated with George from time to time, and he had been so glad to hold converse with his own species that he had innocently told them everything he knew. As his master had suspected, the tame man would occasionally slip some nutriment to a stray member of the pack when the Governor was absent or occupied. The wild men did not attempt to persuade him to desert and flee with them to the hills, because he was more useful where he was. In the hills he would be only another mouth to feed — and a mouth that had been accustomed to feeding well.

"We stop here, men," the leader of the pack projected audibly, muf-

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fling his vocalizations so that they would not carry too far; he did not quite comprehend that to the sentries one noise of the night was very much like another. "Remember, we've got to get the sentries all at once, and in the back. If they face you, you're lost. Their weapons — I don't know how they work, but they make our guns look sick. And if just one of the sentries gives the alarm, they'll get all of us. They're telepaths, you know, but they won't sense us unless they're — well — sort of *listening*."

The other men, who had heard most of these sentiments before, shuffled their pedal extremities uneasily. "What chance have we got against them, Bill?" asked a small one — not much more than a cub he was, actually. "You know they can lick us any time. And what if we do manage to kill the sentries and get to the palace and kill the Governor? How much good would that do us? They'll just send another Governor."

"They would become afraid of us!" Bill declared, the more fiercely in that he could not answer this question even to satisfy himself. He had been taught that it was the leader's duty to kill the alien Governor, as it had been the duty of his father and his grandfather and countless ancestors before them. None had succeeded, although some had managed to create larger disturbances than others. If Bill succeeded, he would have a folk song made about him; on the other hand, if he failed spectacularly enough, he might still be adjudged worthy of a folk song.

"They would respect us," he went on lamely. "We ourselves might not escape, but they would respect and fear those who were left in the hills."

There was a restless muttering from his pack. "Joe's right," another spoke up. The bristles atop this one's head were white, indicating that he was of advanced age — particularly for a warrior. There could not be too many men in the hills if they used their old in raids. "It's pretty much useless. If we frighten 'em enough, they'll just take their ships over the mountains and bomb us out. All that happens is that we become more important than the pretty landscape. And it isn't going to give *me* much satisfaction to know that in killing me they've spoiled their view."

"Maybe we can get some of their weapons, learn how to use them ourselves," Bill replied. "Anyhow," he went on with more certainty, "it's better doing this than living like hunted animals in the hills."

"We *are* hunted animals," interposed the old one.

"If you don't like the way I'm running things, you can go home," Bill said. "Give me liberty or give me death."

There was silence for a moment while the pack admired Bill's felicity of phrasing.

"Just what is liberty?" asked the cub.

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"This isn't the time to get metaphysical!" Bill snapped. "I told you you were too young to come, but you insisted."

"Oh, all right," the young one said. "I was just asking. I got a right to ask, don't I?"

Tradition was too strong for the dissenters. Besides, they couldn't think of anything better to do. So everything went on as planned. Disposing of the sentries was easy, suspiciously so to Bill, who distrusted anything that was uncomplicated just as much as he feared anything that was complex. But it was no trap; the aliens valued the lives of their guards and they would not let ten die as bait. One or two, perhaps, but not ten. The cost of transporting them from the Home Planet was too high.

No, it was only that there had been quiet in the valley for so many *zitarn* that the sentries were careless. Most of the ones on guard were newcomers and had never actually experienced a raid, so they could not really believe there was anything to fear from the harmless-looking native life forms. There were records, of course, and stories — but such accounts only describe the things that happened to someone else.

Four of the sentries were actually at rest; six stared up at the large pale moon and may have been thinking wistfully of the seven small bright ones that circled their own world. Only two were watchful to any degree, but it did them no good in the end. All of them died without knowing what had happened. It was lucky, Bill thought, that, if they did not look like human beings or live like them, at least they died like them.

There was nothing between the men and the living place but the smooth green stretch of lawn. Now that they were so close to their objective, they grew apprehensive. It was too close. . . . Before them the living place rose, iridescing and shimmering, changing before their human eyes into a thousand fantastic shapes their alien minds could not begin to comprehend. Yet, strange as it was to them, limited as their sensibilities were, they still were able to find it pleasing according to their ideas of beauty.

"It looks just like a palace in one of those old fairy-tale books we have in the cave," Joe, the cub, murmured. "It would be an awful pity to destroy it."

"We won't destroy it, Joe," Bill said, equally impressed, although he would have scorned to admit it. "Not unless we absolutely have to. All we want to destroy is those inside."

"If they were really bad," Joe offered hesitantly, "could they have built such a lovely thing as that?"

At this, all the members of the pack laughed, even the old one who had first sided with the cub.

As they crossed the sward together, an aperture widened in the side of the palace. Bill's hand in-

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stinctively tightened on his gun, but it was only George's white, frightened face that peered out — solid and reassuringly constant in shape. And yet even he, although a man, looked somewhat alien to them; for those thin, tough creatures of the woods and hill were little accustomed to the sight of their fellows grown sleek and fat in captivity.

"I — I thought I heard shots," George quavered. "And then voices. What do you want? Why are you here?"

Bill knew very well that George realized something, if not all, of what they wanted, but that he feared his own knowledge. So Bill did not deign to answer the question. "I thought the palace was sound-conditioned," he said instead.

"The resting chambers are," George replied reluctantly, "but not my quarters. The noises don't bother me; my senses are not as keen as theirs. And someone must keep on guard, be able to hear. . . . But answer me: *why have you come?*"

"You know why we've come," Bill finally challenged him. "And you've known for a long time that we would come like this one day."

"I won't let you in, you know," George said in a wavering voice. "It's no use asking."

"We don't need you to let us in," Bill replied contemptuously. "We can 'let' ourselves in. Will you try to stop us? Guard, pooh! They wouldn't give a pet a weapon, now would they?"

George looked at him with terrified eyes, but said nothing.

"We don't really need you," Bill went on, "but you could make it easier for us to do what we're going to do anyhow. Remember, we're your own kind and they are our oppressors. We've come to kill them. It's your duty to help us because you are a man and we are men. Show us where the Governor sleeps."

"He's always been a very kind master to me," George said weakly. "I can't betray him."

"You'd rather betray your own people then?"

"He's never mistreated me — he feeds me well and gives me clothing. He's fond of me too; he treats me as if I were his own child."

"But you're not a child. You're an old man. Will you help us?"

"I've fed you," George pleaded. "I've fed you lots of times from his stores — you too have eaten his food. And I think he knew, but he never said anything about it, let me go on doing it. He's kind. . . ."

"We don't want charity," Bill stated. "We want our rights. We haven't eaten his food; he's been eating ours, for this Earth is ours. Don't you want it to be free again?"

"I'm not sure," George murmured. "After all, I don't know what this freedom is; I've only heard about it. I have only your word that it's a good thing. I might not even like it — it sounds uncomfortable. I don't even know if it's true that we once did own this planet or whether

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it's just a legend. As far as I know, things have always been the way they are now. . . ."

"Let's go, Bill," Joe pleaded. "We can still get out of this. Sentries have been killed before —"

"Shut up, you little fool!" Bill snarled. He turned to George. "We could kill you, you know."

George's fat face was ashen. "I know. I guess you will too. If you killed the sentries, you'd see no reason to spare me."

"Ah," Bill said, "but *we* wouldn't kill one of our own kind, you see. Besides, why should we? You can't warn the Governor, anyhow, without going up to him — which we naturally won't let you do. His room is sound-conditioned, so he can't hear you. And you're only a poor, low-grade human being — humans can't project thoughts, can they? And only a thought would save your beloved master. Why don't you warn him? Go ahead."

The men stirred restlessly.

". . . The Governor," George said, after a pause, "has learned to speak my language . . . a little. . . . Sometimes . . . I almost think I could speak his."

He closed his eyes, and the faint lines in his white forehead deepened with the intensity of his thought. Bill laughed, but the other men were silent. Unlike Bill, they were not so thoroughly convinced of their own inferiority that they felt the feat to be impossible.

But Bill was the leader and they feared him — even more than they feared the aliens. Otherwise they would have shot George before the projected thought, his clumsy but successful warning to the Governor, ripped like a shriek even through their minds, so strong it was. The shot followed so close that, for that same single instant, it seemed that Bill had achieved telepathic powers too.

III

"The fumes aren't right," Gorys projected petulantly, pushing his inhaler away from him.

Privately Krayn agreed, although politeness made him keep a shield before the thought. Something had happened to the savor; now the chemicals sensed no better than those you could purchase in any bazaar throughout the Galaxy.

"It's this new man," Gorys continued. "Oh, I suppose he's trying his best, but he can't prepare the inhaler the way George used to."

"George had more training," Krayn suggested. "Give this one time, sir; he'll eventually be as good as George ever was." And George had been good — Krayn hadn't realized that. He had underestimated Gorys; he had underestimated Gorys' animals. But he was not rigid and he was young — he could adapt himself to new ideas readily enough.

"No one will be as good as George was," Gorys ideated fiercely. "No one can replace him. He wasn't

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merely a servant or a pet; he was my friend."

Krayn had no reply to make. What can one say to sentiment? Could he, after all, tell Gorys that it was just as easy to replace a friend as a pet or a servant?

"I have had his body cremated as if he were one of us," Gorys went on defiantly. "It is being flown back to the Home Planet."

Krayn raised a derisive antenna. The fumes of the ill-prepared inhaler were too strong for his discretion. "And then, sir? Will you place it in your family vault?"

"Why shouldn't I? He gave his life for me. He put his loyalty to me above his loyalty to his own kind."

"That just goes to prove he's nothing but an animal," Krayn replied rashly. "You'd hardly think the betrayal of his own species admirable in one of us, for example? Really, don't you think the pets' cemetery would be more appropriate?"

"In life he chose my species over his," Gorys replied coldly. "Why should he not remain with them in death? And where else should his remains be placed but in my family vault? I account him a member of my family now."

Krayn was not too befuddled to miss his superior's unfavorable response to his ill-advised suggestion. He changed the subject, knowing that he did so awkwardly. "You disposed of the pack that attacked us last night, of course?"

"Naturally."

"And what will you do about the other wild ones, sir? You can't risk this happening again."

"No, you're quite right — I can't. I'm afraid, Krayn, that if you become Governor you will not have such a pleasant view to gaze upon."

If he became Governor? There was doubt then? Not in his own mind. His plans depended upon it.

"You'll atomize the hills then, sir? A wise move."

"It is the only course possible," Gorys replied somberly.

"And a fitting memorial to George," Krayn could not keep from projecting.

Gorys observed his junior. "Sometimes, Krayn, I wonder whether you really *are* fit to be a diplomat."

The other iridesced in fear. It would be fatal for his schemes if he were transferred. He must act quickly. "Forgive me, sir . . ." he projected haltingly. "The inhaler . . . I can't control myself. . . ."

"Yes, it *is* too strong. If this new man doesn't learn more quickly, I'll have to send him back to the breeding farms. . . . Returning to George, you'll be interested to know, Krayn —" he looked searchingly at his junior "— that I am preparing a memorial. I'm having a statue of him erected in my native town on the Home Planet. On it will be the inscription: TO GEORGE — A FAITHFUL FRIEND. I'm sure you consider that foolishly sentimental . . . ?"

"After all, he did save your life,"

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Krayn tried to reingratiate himself. "He deserves a little sentiment." As a matter of fact, the statue was an excellent idea. It would publicize the value of men as pets — intelligent, loyal, trustworthy. What other pet would defend your life at the risk of his own, betray his own kind for yours? The story of Gorys' George would make marvelous publicity — probably become folklore. Of course there would always be some skeptics who wouldn't believe it; he himself might not if he hadn't been there to see for himself.

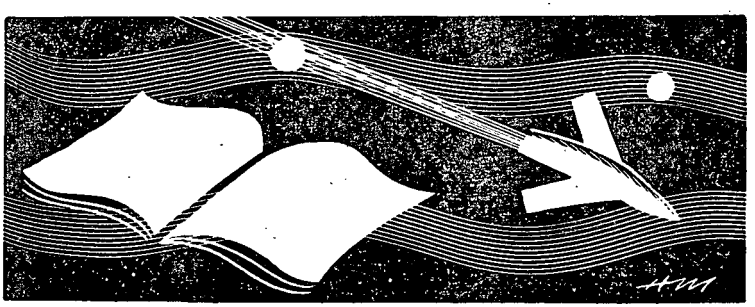
And men would sell like mad. Now that Krayn had discovered they could project, under the proper stimulus, their most serious drawback — that they communicated via sound — would be eliminated. He could have their vocal communication apparatus removed, so that they would make appealing house pets.

Gorys, of course, would not allow them to be sold, but Gorys could not last much longer — even in the natural course of things. And, if it became necessary, Krayn could always help out nature. There were a number of chemicals he could slip into Gorys' inhaler, any one of which should do the trick. If they were detected, it would be thought that the new man had put them in — through clumsiness, for no one could believe the species intelligent enough to contrive murder with such comparative subtlety.

Then, as Governor, Krayn could easily get the man concession, since no one back home would be aware as yet of this animal's potential value. Krayn would not only acquire a fortune, but he would increase the importance of the planet to the point where the Governorship would mean something — wealth and power at one stroke. Prospects seemed bright. He must hurry and act before the statue was completed and interest in men aroused.

"As a matter of fact, sir," Krayn continued, "I think a statue to George would be a *splendid* idea."

No matter how deeply Gorys probed Krayn's mind, he could find no hint of sarcasm.



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Despite the title and the subject matter, this story (for the benefit of any hair-splitters in the audience) is not *science fiction. It's a fantasy, an allegory . . . I'm not quite sure what: it establishes its own form. And by means of that imaginative form it manages to take you inside people — two likable, pitiable, lost lovers who might have been observed by O. Henry or Ring Lardner — and give you a deeper comprehension of them . . . and perhaps, ruefully, of yourself.*

Astronomy Lesson

by WILLARD MARSH

STEPHANIE MUST HAVE THOUGHT DR. Abernathy was insane. You could see it close up in her eyes, the way she rolled them above the gag. In the background, the brain-exchanger crackled with static electricity. Then just as the doctor's hand gripped the switch, a hand gripped the arm of Humphrey's seat.

He turned to watch the girl beside him. He seldom noticed other theater-goers, but this girl was taking it pretty hard. Identification, they called it in psychology. Humphrey didn't blame her, it was a tense moment. He decided to reassure her, even though some people practically got insulting when you did.

"It's okay," he whispered, "she gets away."

"I know," the girl whispered back, but she kept straining forward.

Humphrey turned back to the screen to see the laboratory window shatter, and the arrow pinning Dr. Abernathy's hand to the control panel. Then Stephanie's fiancé vaulted inside, dropped his bow, and began untying her.

The lights came on, the screen went blank, and through the brisk organ music babies began awakening noisily. Humphrey and the girl stood waiting for their aisle to clear, blinking at each other with that drained faraway look.

"I kept thinking Grant would *never* get there," she said.

"Yeah, it was a close call."

They caught each other in a smile, aware that they had both been talking out loud.

"I like to see a picture through twice, if it's a good one." She grinned defiantly. "Do you ever?"

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Humphrey hesitated, not wanting to admit it.

"Anyway, if you leave early then what's there left to do?" she said. "You know, especially on Saturday night."

He knew, all right. But already the crowd was shouldering them into the lobby, separating them before he even got a chance to remember what she looked like. He could see her head, the dull brown tight curls, bobbing on away.

"The reason I see it through twice," he called, "is because you can be more critical the second time." She turned and hung back for him to catch up. Politely squeezing between an elderly couple, Humphrey reached her side. "I'm a great student of human nature," he explained.

She wasn't exactly as pretty as he'd thought, close up, but she had a kind of softness when she smiled, not skeptical like most girls. The fact that she was short enough to have to look up to him gave her a dependent quality, psychologically speaking. It made him feel protective, and at the same time self-conscious.

"Besides," Humphrey said, "it isn't really a question of getting your money's worth with me. I get passes. I'm a radio announcer," he heard himself saying, "so they give me passes all the time to plug their pictures."

They stood in the darkened outer lobby, letting the crowd branch past them towards the parking lots, the cabs and waddling owl cars of Market Street. On a stepladder overhead an usher was lettering Sunday's bill on the marquee. The girl had a look on her face for Humphrey that picked his pulse rate up a notch.

"What's your name?" she breathed.

He remembered his bartender friend Ace telling him to never give a girl your right name, but he couldn't help it. He told her.

"Mine's Pearl," she said, "Pearl Rembrandt — you know, like in the painter? Only I'm not any relation."

Then they got walking back up Market, to the first coffee shop they came to with a booth in back. While Pearl talked Humphrey only half-heard, studying the little things — her sidelong way of glancing, the powdered rash on her cheek, her breathy voice — that made her unique. She'd come to San Francisco to be a telephone operator, not that they didn't have telephones or anything in Petaluma, but the City sounded like more fun.

"I'm in Long Distance," she said, "it's nice, you get to talk to people more. You know, when you have to locate their parties. Just about every day I communicate with for-instance Salt Lake City, Memphis, any place you ever heard of." She sipped at her coffee wistfully. "It's funny, I talk to people all day but I never get to know them. I guess you don't have that problem, though, probably being so well acquainted in your profession."

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Humphrey slid the sugar bowl back and forth. "I'm not really a radio announcer," he said. "I'm like you, I left Salinas because I wanted to make something of myself. I took a course in radio announcing at the YMCA a while back, but now I'm studying movies this year. Maybe I can get to be a director someday." When he looked up Pearl wasn't disappointed, just surprised. "I'm a sandwich man at Owl's," he said.

"Oh," she said bravely, "well still, I'll bet you could be a radio announcer if you really wanted. You have a very distinguished voice."

"Good sandwich men are hard to find," he said defensively. "It isn't everybody can keep up at rush hour, not getting the customers mixed up who want mayonnaise instead of thousand island —"

"Oh, *sandwich* man," Pearl smiled, "I thought you meant those men who march up and down all day with boards on, saying where to eat at."

"Oh no, I'm not in the publicity end. In fact I hardly ever get a chance to contact people in person. Like you in Long Distance," he said. "I'm back in the pantry practically all day."

She reached over to squeeze his hand in understanding. Encouraged, he said, "There's all kinds of tricks in the trade — you know, little things that give you an edge on the other fellow. Like how to stretch the tuna salad when it's getting low . . ."

"How do you?"

Humphrey shifted uncomfortably.

"Oh, if it's a trade secret I guess I shouldn't ask."

He smiled gratefully, then suddenly realized what was wrong with his sandwich. He eagerly opened it, or what was left of it.

"Now take this ham salad special here," he said, "it's spread nice, and it's trimmed okay. But it's got the wrong kind of pickles. He's using straight dills. It should of been sweet pickles, to bring out the flavor of the ham."

"Gee . . . I'd never spot a thing like that in a million years."

Humphrey shrugged modestly.

When they left, and had been walking for a little way, he suddenly said: "You add some potato salad."

"What?" Pearl said dreamily.

"You know, what you asked. To stretch the tuna salad."

Now they turned up Stockton Street, where late lamps leaned over them like benevolent moons. The tunnel swallowed them, magnifying their linked footbeats; emitted them into the sudden aisles of Chinatown. Mysterious shadows moved around them, masking the pad of sandaled feet, the flickering of distant braziers. There were spices in the air, and shrimp and duck blood. Pearl pressed closer, Humphrey walked taller. And then, in that old way no man can unravel, halfway between the Fook Chong Hong Friendly Society headquarters and Sam Yup's Fish Market, they fell in love. They

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stood at the corner of Clay Street, looking up at the stars.

"Aren't they gorgeous?" Pearl said. "How many are there altogether, you suppose?"

And because the stars and everything they monitored indeed were gorgeous, and because she believed so in him, the knowledge came automatically to Humphrey.

"A couple hundred anyway," he said. "At least."

"What keeps them up there? I mean, why aren't there more shooting stars?"

"Gravity and things. It's pretty complicated to explain."

"Oh look, darling, there's one now!" They watched the falling star, dropping in the direction of Portsmouth Square. "Quick, make a wish before it's gone."

They just had time to, before it vanished below the horizon. They loafed down Clay Street in its wake.

"What'd you wish, darling?" Then Humphrey remembered he wasn't supposed to ask.

Pearl hesitated. "It looked so pretty," she said shyly. "I wished we could have it all to ourselves. You?"

"I guess I only wished that whatever you wished for, I'd be in it."

They came down into the leaf-locked slope of Portsmouth Square, opposite the Hall of Justice where no one should have been behind bars, no misery should have been abroad when love, their love, was proof enough against all chaos.

And then Humphrey tripped over the star.

At first they didn't recognize it. It lay, small and deceptive, in a cushion of grass. They kneeled above it, jointly lifting it to the wayward light. It was cool to the palm, and blurrily orange-colored. It had five points that seemed to shift and twinkle, depending on how you looked at them.

"I thought they'd be bigger, somehow," Pearl said.

"They're all different sizes," Humphrey said, with a casualness he had to force. It was a beauty, all right, no getting around it. "Sort of makes a nice souvenir, doesn't it? To round the evening off."

Humphrey hefted the star experimentally. "Maybe we could have it dipped in bronze or something to preserve it. You know, like baby shoes."

He didn't realize the psychological implication of the remark till Pearl giggled in embarrassment.

Arm in arm they floated back up Clay, down Stockton through the tunnel again, with the star lighting a vague cool path before them like a bottled firefly. But when they came out into the thoroughfares it seemed a little conspicuous, so Humphrey slipped it in his pocket.

At the stoop of her rooming house they lingered as if parting were forever.

"When?"

"Tomorrow night?"

"I can't wait till then."

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"Neither can I."

"Here, you keep the star, darling."

"No, you. You found it."

"No, you, because it matches your eyes."

"All right, just till tomorrow night."

Humphrey traded her the star for a kiss, and considered himself shrewder than the characters who got Manhattan for a hatful of beads.

Sunday was practically always taken up with bettering yourself, looking over the week's mistakes with a view to constructive criticism. But today Humphrey woke with a delicious langor that he couldn't recognize, till last night came back. It brought him out of bed with a buoyed-up feeling and the name *Pearl Rembrandt* armoring him like a password or a charm. Too restless for his morning exercises with the bar bells, he took the elevator down to the lobby, and over a chicken salad sandwich and a cup of coffee in the YMCA cafeteria wondered how to kill the long day till tonight.

On the bus out to Golden Gate Park, he carefully followed the conversation in the seat behind him. Little things like that would help him figure out his customers whenever he got to be a counterman. It was a pair of women talking, and Humphrey studied them casually from the corner of his eye. But they must have noticed because they began making obvious cracks. He haughtily ignored them all the rest of the way.

Dropping off the bus at the music concourse, Humphrey cut through the grove of decapitated trees and passed between the pink priest-headed lions of the De Young Museum. Inside, he kept pretty much to the least crowded exhibits, examining the suits of old armor and imagining himself in them, the personal effects of famous historical personages. After a while he passed a room with glass cases filled with rocks and things. Humphrey didn't ordinarily specialize in just plain fossils unless they had a historical factor to them. But the one in the center was interesting enough to have a closer look. It was about the size of your fist or so, pitted and black so that it didn't look like anything. But according to the card it was full of all kinds of valuable minerals: gold, silver, nickel — even uranium. No wonder they had a uniformed guard hanging around.

Humphrey remembered planning to be a uranium prospector, just before taking up radio announcing, in view of the expensive government reward money connected with it. But who'd ever think a rock like this could be so valuable? And the funny thing, they hadn't even dug it up anywhere because the card said "Fallen, Alameda County, March 5, 1922." In sudden excitement Humphrey remembered the star he and Pearl had found. He strolled over to the guard nonchalantly.

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"I notice this, uh, exhibit says *fallen*," he said. "Is that fallen like a star?"

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"You know, like a star. An astronomy star."

"Oh, I catch your drift." The guard looked like a creep, and Humphrey noticed that he wasn't calling him "sir" any more either. "I suppose you could think of it as resembling a star, if that makes it easier for you. However, it happens to be a meteorite."

Come on, stop stalling, Humphrey thought. But he controlled himself to ask: "The point is, is it better or worse than a star?"

"Better or worse than a star," the guard said thoughtfully. At the same time he looked a little nervous. "In what way do you mean, sir?"

"Well, like you haven't got any actual stars on exhibit here?"

"No, sir. Not in *this* museum." He began edging away from Humphrey.

"But if you knew where you could get one," Humphrey called, "I guess it would be worth a lot more than this old meteorite?"

"I'm sure it would be a novel exhibit, sir. And now if you'll excuse me?"

Probably miffed at the way Humphrey was dressed or something. Put a uniform on some people and right away they get autocratic.

On the bus back to town he got thinking how it would be if he and Pearl gave the star to the museum. They could have their names on a plaque as donors, and even have the guard fired if they wanted. Then he decided, after all, civic enterprise was one thing and money was another, and if the star was really that valuable maybe it would be better to take it to a smeltery. It took a lot of thinking through, there were a lot of angles, so Humphrey decided to drop in on Ace; he would know. Besides, he felt like a quiet beer.

"— Been keeping yourself, kid? What'll it be, the usual?" Ace had already drawn a mug of beer and scraped the head off it, skidding it down the bar to Humphrey. "You look like you just hit the daily double. What is it, love or prosperity?"

"I guess a little of both, in a manner of speaking."

"Then how about slipping a pal the inside? Or at least a phone number."

Humphrey laughed weakly. "She's a nice girl, Ace. You wouldn't be interested."

"Believe me, I'm always interested in nice girls. Especially if they're prosperous."

Ace was a great kidder, a great student of psychology. You'd never judge by looking at him, but he used to be a professional prize fighter. In fact, while he never said so in so many words, he could have probably been the world's champion welterweight today if it hadn't been for politics.

"No, it's nothing like that."

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Humphrey chose his words carefully. "We just found this — uh — sort of property that looks like it'll turn out to be worth something."

He set his mouth stubbornly, prepared to resist all efforts of Ace to learn more. After all, it was a personal thing of his and Pearl's, a practically sacred bond.

But Ace only nodded casually. "She got any idea how much this property's worth?"

"Oh no, it'll be a wonderful surprise for her."

"I'll bet. How do you know it's the genuine goods?"

"I did some research," Humphrey said evasively.

"Uh huh. Got any idea where she's at right now, this girl of yours?"

"You mean right this minute? Home, I guess."

"You guess. She wouldn't be out doing some research on her own — like say if this was maybe a piece of jewelry, getting it appraised?"

"Oh no, Ace — not Pearl! Not even if the thought occurred to her."

Ace smiled wearily. "You'd be surprised some of the thoughts that occur to dames when there's a little loose change involved. Well, you don't need my advice on something so elementary. Lemme get you another beer, kid. On the house."

Ace strolled down to the tap, whistling between his teeth. Humphrey just sat there, shaken at the possibilities that crowded in on him. Had she suspected all along the star was potentially liable to be valuable? He tried to reconstruct her exact words, those sidelong little smiles of hers, but in the cold light of day memory gave them a mocking quality. She'd suggested that he keep the star and all that, but maybe it was only to throw his suspicions off. What would have happened if he'd really taken her up on it? It would have been a good test, he should have thought of it. And why, if she was supposed to be so much in love with him, why didn't she want him to come around until tonight? He would have phoned her, but then he realized she hadn't given him her number. And maybe that just wasn't just an oversight.

Ace set the beer before him.

Humphrey looked up bewilderedly. "What do you think I should do?"

He approached the rooming house from the blind side, so she couldn't spot him from her window. There was a car drawn up out front, maybe only one of the other roomers, maybe someone who could take her better places than a sandwich man could. Through the day's last light Humphrey climbed the stairs to her room, knocked lightly.

"Who is it?" Pearl called.

He knocked again. This time the door opened, and there was no chance of her slamming it because he had his foot on the sill.

"Why, Humphrey — oh darling, you're so *early*." She was upset, all right, but at the same time she man-

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aged to look pleased to see him. "I'm not even half ready. Can't you come back in just a little while, I'm a perfect mess."

At least that was no lie. With her shapeless robe and the goo on her face and her hair in curlers, he felt downright deceived by the picture he'd been carrying around in his mind all day.

"I don't care," he half-pushed on inside. "I mean, now that I'm here it'll only take a minute."

"But Humphrey, really, I have to press a dress, there's still the rest of my undies to wash out —"

Swinging the door shut behind him, he gave her a winning smile. "You don't look so bad. Honest."

"Oh? That's very nice to know, I'm sure." She gave him a frosty look that matched her tone of voice. "I don't want to turn your stomach or anything."

"What're you talking about? I *said* you look okay. Is that an insult, you got to get all huffy?"

"I'm sorry, I guess I'm just a little flustered."

"That's all right, I'm sorry too," Humphrey said automatically, looking around the room. There was a jewelry box half open on her bureau, with a diamond necklace spilling out. "Nice place you got here," he said, edging over to it casually.

"Humphrey, *will* you come to the point and then please let me finish up?" Pearl said. "What is it you keep looking around for?"

"What makes you think I'm looking for anything?" he said craftily. He backed to rest with his elbow on the bureau, facing her. "That is, unless you got anything to hide."

Pearl stared at him. "Have you been drinking? You have, you smell like a brewery. Just what are you up to, anyway?"

That was the psychological tipoff: projection.

"Don't worry about what *I'm* up to," he said significantly.

She was beginning to get nervous. He kept watching her, playing it cool the way Ace said, waiting for her to reveal where she'd hidden it. Ace still hadn't learned exactly what it was, but he knew a pawnbroker who could get them the best price for anything in the precious minerals line regardless.

"I don't like you like this," Pearl said sullenly. "If you can't act right, go 'way till you can come back sober."

"Sorry, baby, it won't work." Now Humphrey turned to look directly in the jewel box. It wasn't there, of course, she wouldn't leave it lying in the open. He lifted the diamond necklace free, dangling it from a negligent finger. "Is that how you got this? Tossing over some sucker once you got it from him?"

"Get your hands off my things and get out!" Pearl's face was so hard and old he wondered how he ever could have seen it differently.

Humphrey dropped the necklace in his pocket. "Want to trade? Your necklace for my star?"

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"The *star?* You can have your dirty old star back anytime, you Indian-giver!" She started for the closet, then turned with a malicious smile.

"On second thought," she said, "you can keep the necklace. It's as phony as you are. I think I'll just hang onto the star. I'm kind of sentimental about presents I don't know the price of."

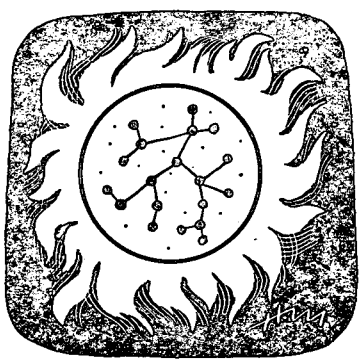
It was dusk now, but there was a dull red sourceless light in the room. Through it he could see her face, twisted and sweaty. He was beginning to sweat too, the hot dry air drawing it out of him. He moved towards her, backing her against the closet. She spread her arms in a barrier.

"It's mine," Humphrey said thickly. "Who was it found it?"

Pearl laughed in contempt. "Who is it's got it?"

"Ask me that in just about ten seconds —" He wrenched her aside and she raked at him with her nails, but that wasn't why he cried out.

When he yanked at the closet door the knob came away, burning his hand. It was red hot. Even as he dropped it the door began caving in. And now through the swirling ashes they could see the star, glowing like a furnace as it filled the room with a furious white rush.



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Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

LAST MONTH THIS DEPARTMENT DEplored both the quantity and the quality of science fiction on TV; but one single program, first aired on March 9, has proved enough to compensate for any amount of neglect and distortion.

This, of course, was Walt Disney's *Man in Space*, a spectacular tour de force which managed to compress into one-hour-minus-commercials just about every significant fact concerning the past, present and immediate future of spaceflight, and to do it so entertainingly and communicatively that one is tempted to guess that more people (literally by the millions) received an adequate preliminary instruction in the Age of Space from this one program than from the total of all previous efforts.

Participants included Willy Ley, Heinz Haber and Wernher von Braun — a cast which guarantees authenticity . . . and which also, one must concede, guarantees a certain amount of optimism (though von Braun was less extreme here than on some other occasions).

It's a fine thing for a book department to go about insisting that people watch television; but if you missed this particular program of DISNEYLAND, it's imperative that you see it when it is rerun — probably twice: once around the time this column appears and again later in the summer. (Since Disney's co-creators are hardly ever mentioned in print, let it here be noted that this masterpiece was produced and directed by Ward Kimball, who also wrote the script with William Baché.)

Disney's program went no further than the first manned satellite. For wider exploration of the solar system, you might investigate two recent books: Robert S. Richardson's EXPLORING MARS (McGraw-Hill, $4*) and Gérard de Vaucouleurs' PHYSICS OF THE PLANET MARS (Macmillan, $10*). Richardson's mistitled book deals little with exploration and only partly with Mars; it's a general survey of contemporary knowledge of the planets, with particular emphasis on the possibilities of life-as-we-know-it, all covered in a much more simplified and "popularized" manner than the author's articles in *Astounding*. Vaucouleurs, a French astronomer now working in Australia, has produced the definitive compendium of researches in what, with a pretty sense of etymol-

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ogy, he calls areophysics — which is to Mars (Ares) as geophysics is to Earth (Gea). His avowed purpose was to write a book satisfactory at once to the general reader and to the technical specialist; but I fear he overestimates the physico-mathematical attainments of the general reader.

Personally, I found the Richardson book too simple and the Vaucouleurs (I confess) too tough for me; and I think the same will be true of most science fiction readers. But the Vaucouleurs is a splendid reference book; and both are worth your looking at, if only for their odd cumulative effect of reinforcing Fortean skepticism. As Richardson observes, "Reading the remarks of the leading astronomers of half a century ago leaves one feeling very much discouraged. So many of the things they believed about the starry heavens were dead wrong. . . . Perhaps most of our own cherished beliefs about the stars and planets will likewise be wrong." So beware of criticizing any author's description of a planet because "Science says" otherwise . . . today; tomorrow the description may be sternest scientific "fact."

For a footnote on one of the most arguable of all terrestrial "facts," the existence of the sea serpent (which the normally dubious Willy Ley thinks probable), see Edward Rowe Snow's AMAZING SEA STORIES NEVER TOLD BEFORE (Dodd, Mead, $3*), which, along with a fine lot of murders and mutinies, contains a long account of the sea serpent sighted *and captured* by the whaling ship *Monongahela* near the Marquesas on January 13, 1852 — an account which would settle the controversy once and for all . . . if only it were rather more firmly substantiated by evidence.

New Novels: As utterly delightful a contribution to future-fiction as has crossed this desk in years is Leonard Wibberley's THE MOUSE THAT ROARED (Little, Brown, $3.50*), serialized in the *Saturday Evening Post* as THE DAY NEW YORK WAS INVADED. It isn't going too far to call this s.f., since it happens next year and tells of the Q-Bomb (made of H_4, quadium). But it's also a satire, a fantasy, a light romance (with my favorite heroine of the year), a cautionary tale, and a sort of satisfactory solution to Heinlein's *Solution Unsatisfactory*. In whatever light you view it, the conquest of the United States (Q-Bomb and all) by the staunch bowmen of the tiny Duchy of Grand Fenwick sparks a very nearly perfect book, on no account to be missed.

Margot Bennett's THE LONG WAY BACK (Coward-McCann, $3.50*) is familiar stuff — exploration in 3406 of a Britain wholly reverted to savagery by the black scientists of a great new African civilization — but it's written with unusual skill and bite and deeper insight into complexity of character than you expect in such a tale. Damon Knight's

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HELL'S PAVEMENT (Lion, 35c) is an experiment as fascinating as it is ultimately unsuccessful: an expansion of *The Analogues* (*Astounding*, January, 1952) and other material into the author's first long novel, covering a half dozen assorted future civilizations, all detailed with dazzling ingenuity and plausibility . . . and never adding up to a consecutive coherent story. Knight's mastery of the short story and novelet is familiar to you (if not, see p. 3!); his second novel may easily be a beauty — and meanwhile this one is worth reading for its piecemeal brilliance. Alan E. Nourse's A MAN OBSESSED (Ace, 35c) combines a murder-revenge plot with intelligent extrapolation of researches in brain surgery and psychiatry; it's more carelessly written than Nourse's best stories, but the medical background is fine (the author is due for his M.D. around the time this appears) and the compulsive tempo is breathtaking. With a reprint of Andre Norton's poetic adventure STAR RANGERS (retitled THE LAST PLANET) in the same volume, it's a good buy.

Shorts and anthologies: William Tenn's OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS (Ballantine, $2*; paper, 35c) is less than firstrate only by Tenn's own high standards. His very best stories have been anthologized, some many times; here he has wisely picked seven unreprinted stories and one essay, from seven different magazines (including F&SF) in the years 1947–1954. If they include no *Brooklyn Project*, no *Betelgeuse Bridge*, they also do not include a dull line.

I'm afraid there are quite a few dull lines, and even pages, in Martin Greenberg's anthology, ALL ABOUT THE FUTURE (Gnome, $3.50*), impossible though that seems from such authors as Anderson, Miller, Pohl and Sturgeon. These normally admirable writers seem for once to have used words less creatively than calculatingly, with an eye on the check determined by word-count. But all of the stories contain effective moments, in both thinking and writing; and an extrapolatory essay by Heinlein, a neglected 1944 short story by Malcolm Jameson, and a fine *Galaxy* novella by Damon Knight are enough to make the collection well worth reading.

Belated note: There's one interesting science fiction item in Evelyn Waugh's 1954 miscellany, TACTICAL EXERCISE (Little, Brown, $3.75*): the short novelet *Love Among the Ruins* (published in England as an independent book). An unevenness of tone, an occasional heavyhandedness of satire keeps this from reaching the level of similar stories by Huxley or Orwell (or of Waugh's own contemporary fiction); but the author's characteristic wit and grace are sufficiently in evidence to make this "romance of the near future" of interest to every reader.

* Books marked with an asterisk may be ordered through F&SF's Readers' Book Service. For details, see page 2.

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Manly Wade Wellman has recently published one of the year's most distinguished fact-crime volumes, DEAD AND GONE: CLASSIC CRIMES OF NORTH CAROLINA *(University of North Carolina) — a collection so rich in folklore and balladry as not to be missed by any admirer of Mr. Wellman's fiction. In telling of one murder later commemorated by a ballad, Wellman thus describes the lamented victim, Charlie Silver: "He was strong, healthy, good-looking and agreeable. He had lots of friends. Everybody liked him. He was especially popular at the play-parties and working-bees of the district, because he could bear a helpful hand at raising barns or building fences, and when the work was finished and the fun began he could make merry by talking, laughing and playing musical instruments." This sounds like a direct description of our friend John (and God preserve him from ever meeting a woman like Silver's murdering wife Frankie!). Here is John at his most neighborly and helpful, saving an entire village from destruction and easing the tormented life of a man who was more than a man — for the blood of the Giants of Genesis still survives in those hills which Mr. Wellman knows so intimately.*

Walk Like a Mountain

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

ONCE AT SKY NOTCH, I NEVER grudged the trouble getting there. It was so purely pretty, I was glad outlanders weren't apt to crowd in and spoil all.

The Notch cut through a tall peak that stood against a higher cliff. Steep brushy faces each side, and a falls at the back that made a trickly branch, with five pole cabins along the waterside. Corn patches, a few pigs in pens, chickens running round, a cow tied up one place. It wondered me how they ever got a cow up there. Laurels grew, and viney climbers, and mountain flowers in bunches and sprawls. The water made a happy noise. Nobody moved in the yards or at the doors, so I stopped by a tree and hollered the first house.

"Hello the house!" I called. "Hello to the man of the house and all inside!"

A plank door opened about an inch. "Hello to yourself," a gritty

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voice replied me. "Who's that out there with the guitar?"

I moved from under the tree. "My name's John. Does Mr. Lane Jarrett live up here? Got word for him, from his old place on Drowning Creek."

The door opened wider, and there stood a skimpy little man with gray whiskers. "That's funny," he said.

The funnyness I didn't see. I'd known Mr. Lane Jarrett years back, before he and his daughter Page moved to Sky Notch. When his uncle Jeb died and heired him some money, I'd agreed to carry it to Sky Notch, and, gentlemen, it was a long, weary way getting there.

First a bus, up and down and through mountains, stop at every pig trough for passengers. I got off at Charlie's Jump — who Charlie was, nor why or when he jumped, nobody there can rightly say. Climbed a high ridge, got down the far side, then a twenty-devil way along a deep valley river. Up another height, another beyond that. Then it was night, and nobody would want to climb the steep face above, because it was grown up with the kind of trees that the dark melts in around you. I made a fire and took my supper rations from my pocket. Woke at dawn and climbed up and up and up, and here I was.

"Funny, about Lane Jarrett," gritted the little man out. "Sure you ain't come about that business?"

I looked up the walls of the Notch. Their tops were toothy rocks, the way you'd think those walls were two jaws, near about to close on what they'd caught inside them. Right then the Notch didn't look so pretty.

"Can't say, sir," I told him, "Till I know what business you mean."

"Rafe Enoch!" he boomed out the name, like firing two barrels of a gun. "That's what I mean!" Then he appeared to remember his manners, and came out, puny in his jeans and no shoes on his feet. "I'm Oakman Dillon," he named himself. "John — that's your name, huh? Why you got that guitar?"

"I pick it some," I replied him. "I sing." Tweaking the silver strings, I sang a few lines:

By the shore of Lonesome River
Where the waters ebb and flow,
Where the wild red rose is budding
And the pleasant breezes blow,

It was there I spied the lady
That forever I adore,
As she was a-lonesome walking
By the Lonesome River shore. . . .

"Rafe Enoch!" he grit-grated out again. "Carried off Miss Page Jarrett the way you'd think she was a banty chicken!"

Slap, I quieted the strings with my palm. "Mr. Lane's little daughter Page was stolen away?"

He sat down on the door-log. "She ain't suchy little daughter. She's six foot maybe three inches — taller'n you, even. Best-looking big

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woman I ever see, brown hair like a wagonful of home-cured tobacco, eyes green and bright as a fresh-squoze grape pulp."

"Fact?" I said, thinking Page must have changed a right much from the long-leggy little girl I'd known, must have grown tall like her daddy and her dead mammy, only taller. "Is this Rafe Enoch so big, a girl like that is right for him?"

"She's puny for him. He's near about eight foot tall, best I judge." Oakman Dillon's gray whiskers stuck out like a mad cat's. "He just grabbed her last evening, where she walked near the fall, and up them rocks he went like a possum up a jack oak."

I sat down on a stump. "Mr. Lane's a friend of mine. How can I help?"

"Nobody can't help, John. It's right hard to think you ain't knowing all this stuff. Don't many strangers come up here. Ain't room for many to live in the Notch."

"Five homes," I counted them with my eyes.

"Six. Rafe Enoch lives up at the top." He jerked his head toward the falls. "Been there a long spell — years, I reckon, since when he run off from somewhere. Heard tell he broke a circus man's neck for offering him a job with a show. He built up top the falls, and he used to get along with us. Thanked us kindly for a mess of beans or roasting ears. Lately, he's been mean-talking."

"Nobody mean-talked him back? Five houses in the Notch mean five grown men — couldn't they handle one giant?"

"Giant size ain't all Rafe Enoch's got." Again the whiskers bristled up. "Why! He's got powers, like he can make rain fall —"

"No," I put in quick. "Can't even science men do that for sure."

"I ain't studying science men. Rafe Enoch says for rain to fall, down it comes, ary hour day or night he speaks. Could drown us out of this Notch if he had the mind."

"And he carried off Page Jarrett," I went back to what he'd said.

"That's the whole truth, John. Up he went with her in the evening, daring us to follow him."

I asked, "Where are the other Notch folks?"

"Up yonder by the falls. Since dawn we've been talking Lane Jarrett back from climbing up and getting himself neck-twisted. I came to feed my pigs, now I'm heading back."

"I'll go with you," I said, and since he didn't deny me I went.

The falls dropped down a height as straight up as a chimney, and a many times taller, and their water boiled off down the branch. Either side of the falls, the big boulder rocks piled on top of each other like stones in an almighty big wall. Looking up, I saw clouds boiling in the sky, dark and heavy and wet-looking, and I remembered what Oakman Dillon had said about big Rafe Enoch's rain-making.

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A bunch of folks were there, and I made out Mr. Lane Jarrett, bald on top and bigger than the rest. I touched his arm, and he turned.

"John! Ain't seen you a way-back time. Let me make you known to these here folks."

He called them their first names—Yoot, Ollie, Bill, Duff, Miss Lulie, Miss Sara May and so on. I said I had a pocketful of money for him, but he just nodded and wanted to know did I know what was going on.

"Looky up against them clouds, John. That pointy rock. My girl Page is on it."

The rock stuck out like a spur on a rooster's leg. Somebody was scrouched down on it, with the clouds getting blacker above, and a long, long drop below.

"I see her blue dress," allowed Mr. Oakman, squinting up. "How long she been there, Lane?"

"I spotted her at sunup," said Mr. Lane. "She must have got away from Rafe Enoch and crope out there during the night. I'm going to climb."

He started to shinny up a rock, up clear of the brush around us. And, Lord, the laugh that came down on us! Like a big splash of water, it was clear and strong, and like water it made us shiver. Mr. Oakman caught onto Mr. Lane's ankle and dragged him down.

"Ain't a God's thing ary man or woman can do, with him waiting up there," Mr. Oakman argued.

"But he's got Page," said Mr. Lane busting loose again. I grabbed his elbow.

"Let me," I said.

"You, John? You're a stranger, you ain't got no pick in this."

"This big Rafe Enoch would know if it was you or Mr. Oakman or one of these others climbing, he might fling down a rock or the like. But I'm strange to him. I might wonder him, and he might let me climb all the way up."

"Then?" Mr. Page said, frowning.

"Once up, I might could do something."

"Leave him try it," said Mr. Oakman to that.

"Yes," said one of the ladyfolks.

I slung my guitar behind my shoulder and took to the rocks. No peep of noise from anywhere for maybe a minute of climbing. I got on about the third or fourth rock from the bottom, and that clear, sky-ripping laugh came from over my head.

"Name yourself!" roared down the voice that had laughed.

I looked up. How high was the top I can't say, but I made out a head and shoulders looking down, and knew they were another sight bigger head and shoulders than ever I'd seen on ary mortal man.

"Name yourself!" he yelled again, and in the black clouds a lightning flash wiggled, like a snake caught fire.

"John!" I bawled back.

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"What you aiming to do, John?"

Another crack of lightning, that for a second seemed to peel off the clouds right and left. I looked this way and that. Nowhere to get out of the way should lightning strike, or a rock or anything. On notion, I pulled my guitar to me and picked and sang:

Went to the rock to hide my face,
The rock cried out, "No hiding place!". . . .

Gentlemen, the laugh was like thunder after the lightning.

"Better climb quick, John!" he hollered me. "I'm a-waiting on you up here!"

I swarmed and swarved and scrabbled my way up, not looking down. Over my head that rock-spur got bigger, I figured it for maybe twelve-fifteen feet long, and on it I made out Page Jarrett in her blue dress. Mr. Oakman was right, she was purely big and she was purely good-looking. She hung to the pointy rock with her both long hands.

"Page," I said to her, with what breath I had left, and she stared with her green eyes and gave me an inch of smile. She looked to have a right much of her daddy's natural sand in her craw.

"John," boomed the thunder-voice, close over me now. "I asked you a while back, why you coming up?"

"Just to see how you make the rain fall," I said, under the overhang of the ledge. "Help me up."

Down came a bare brown honey-hairy arm, and a hand the size of a scoop shovel. It got my wrist and snatched me away like a turnip coming out of a patch, and I landed my feet on broad flat stones.

Below me yawned up those rock-toothed tops of the Notch's jaws. Inside them the brush and trees looked mossy and puny. The cabins were like baskets, the pigs and the cow like play-toys, and the branch looked to run so narrow you might bridge it with your shoe. Shadow fell on the Notch from the fattening dark clouds.

Then I looked at Rafe Enoch. He stood over me like a sycamore tree over a wood shed. He was the almightiest big thing I'd ever seen on two legs.

Eight foot high, Oakman Dillon had said truly, and he was thick-made in keeping. Shoulders wide enough to fill a barn door, and legs like tree trunks with fringe-sided buckskin pants on them, and his big feet wore moccasin shoes of bear's hide with the fur still on. His shirt, sewed together of pelts — fox, coon, the like of that — hadn't any sleeves, and hung open from that big chest of his that was like a cotton bale. Topping all, his face put you in mind of the full moon with a yellow beard, but healthy-looking brown, not pale like the moon. Big and dark eyes, and through the yellow beard his teeth grinned like big white sugar lumps.

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"Maybe I ought to charge you to look at me," he said.

I remembered how he'd struck a man dead for wanting him in a show, and I looked elsewhere. First, naturally, at Page Jarrett on the rock spur. The wind from the clouds waved her brown hair like a flag, and fluttered her blue skirt around her drawn-up feet. Then I turned and looked at the broad space above the falls.

From there I could see there was a right much of higher country, and just where I stood with Rafe Enoch was a big shelf, like a lap, with slopes behind it. In the middle of the flat space showed a pond of water, running out past us to make the falls. On its edge stood Rafe Enoch's house, built wigwam-style of big old logs leaned together and chinked between with clay over twigs. No trees to amount to anything on the shelf — just one behind the wigwam-house, and to its branches hung joints that looked like smoke meat.

"You hadn't played that guitar so clever, maybe I mightn't have saved you," said Rafe Enoch's thunder voice.

"Saved?" I repeated him.

"Look." His big club of a finger pointed to the falls, then to those down-hugged clouds. "When they get together, what happens?"

Just as the ledge lip, where the falls went over, stones looked halfway washed out. A big shove of water would take them out the other half, and the whole thing pour down on the Notch.

"Why you doing this to the folks?" I asked.

He shook his head. "John, this is one rain I never called for." He put one big pumpkin-sized fist into the palm of his other hand. "I can call for rain, sure, but some of it comes without me. I can't start it or either stop it, I just know it's coming. I've known about this for days. It'll drown out Sky Notch like a rat nest."

"Why didn't you try to tell them?"

"I tried to tell her." His eyes cut around to where Page Jarrett hung to the pointy rock, and his stool-leg fingers raked his yellow beard. "She was walking off by herself, alone. I know how it feels to be alone. But when I told her, she called me a liar. I brought her up here to save her, and she cried and fought me." A grin. "She fought me better than ary living human I know. But she can't fight me hard enough."

"Can't you do anything about the storm?" I asked him to tell.

"Can do this." He snapped his big fingers, and lightning crawled through the clouds over us. It made me turtle my neck inside my shirt collar. Rafe Enoch never twitched his eyebrow.

"Rafe," I said, "you might could persuade the folks. They're not your size, but they're human like you."

"Them?" He roared his laugh.

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"They're not like me, nor you aren't like me, either, though you're longer-made than common. Page yonder, she looks to have some of the old Genesis giant blood in her. That's why I saved her alive."

"Genesis giant blood," I repeated him, remembering the Book, sixth chapter of Genesis. "'There were giants in the earth in those days.'"

"That's the whole truth," said Rafe. "When the sons of God took wives of the daughters of men — their children were the mighty men of old, the men of renown. That's not exact quote, but it's near enough."

He sat down on a rock, near about as tall sitting as I was standing. "Ary giant knows he was born from the sons of the gods," he said. "My name tells it, John."

I nodded, figuring it. "Rafe — Raphah, the giant whose son was Goliath, Enoch —"

"Or Anak," he put in. "Remember the sons of Anak, and them scared-out spies sent into Canaan? They was grasshoppers in the sight of the sons of Anak, and more ways than just size, John." He sniffed. "They got scared back into the wilderness for forty years. And Goliath!"

"David killed him," I dared remind Rafe.

"By a trick. A slingshot stone. Else he'd not lasted any longer than that."

A finger-snap, and lightning winged over us like a hawk over a chicken run. I tried not to scrouch down.

"What use to fight little old human men," he said, "when you got the sons of the gods in your blood?"

I allowed he minded me of Strap Buckner with that talk.

"Who's Strap Buckner? Why do I mind you of him?"

I picked the guitar, I sang the song:

Strap Buckner he was called, he
was more than eight foot tall,
And he walked like a mountain
among men.
He was good and he was great,
and the glorious Lone Star
State
Will never look upon his like
again.

"Strap Buckner had the strength of ten lions," I said, "and he used it as ten lions. Scorned to fight ordinary folks, so he challenged old Satan himself, skin for skin, on the banks of the Brazos, and if Satan hadn't fought foul —"

"Another dirty fighter!" Rafe got up from where he sat, quick as quick for all his size. "Foul or not, Satan couldn't whup me!"

"Might be he couldn't," I judged, looking at Rafe. "But anyway, the Notch folks never hurt you. Used to give you stuff to eat."

"Don't need their stuff to eat," he said, the way you'd think that was the only argument. He waved his hand past his wigwam-house. "Down yonder is a bunch of hol-

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lows, where ain't no human man been, except maybe once the Indians. I hoe some corn there, some potatoes. I pick wild salad greens here and yonder. I kill me a deer, a bear, a wild hog — ain't no human man got nerve to face them big wild hogs, but I chunk them with a rock or I fling a sharp ash sapling, and what I fling at I bring down. In the pond here I spear me fish. Don't need their stuff to eat, I tell you."

"Need it or not, why let them drown out?"

His face turned dark, the way you'd think smoke drifted over it.

"I can't abide little folks' little eyes looking at me, wondering themselves about me, thinking I'm not rightly natural."

He waited for what I had to say, and it took nerve to say it.

"But you're not a natural man, Rafe. You've allowed that yourself, you say you come from different blood. Paul Bunyan thought the same thing."

He grinned his big sugar-lump teeth at me. Then: "Page Jarrett," he called, "better come off that rock before the rain makes it slippy and you fall off. I'll help you —"

"You stay where you are," she called back. "Let John help."

I went to the edge of that long drop down. The wind blew from some place — maybe below, maybe above or behind or before. I reached out my guitar, and Page Jarrett crawled to where she could lay hold, and that way I helped her to the solid standing. She stood beside me, inches taller, and she put a burning mean look on Rafe Enoch. He made out he didn't notice.

"Paul Bunyan," he said, after what I'd been saying. "I've heard tell his name — champion logger in the northern states, wasn't he?"

"Champion logger," I said. "Bigger than you, I reckon —"

"Not bigger!" thundered Rafe Enoch.

"Well, as big."

"Know ary song about him?"

"Can't say there's been one made. Rafe, you say you despise to be looked on by folks."

"Just by little folks, John. Page Jarrett can look on me if she relishes to."

Quick she looked off, and drew herself up proud. Right then she appeared to be taller than what Mr. Oakman Dillon had reckoned her, and a beauty-looking thing she was, you hear what I say, gentlemen. I cut my eyes up to the clouds; they hung down over us, loose and close, like the roof of a tent. I could feel the closeness around me, the way you feel water when you've waded up to the line of your mouth.

"How soon does the rain start falling?" I asked Rafe.

"Can fall ary time now," said Rafe, pulling a grass-stalk to bite in his big teeth. "Lane's safe off that rock point, it don't differ me a shuck when that rain falls."

"But when?" I asked again. "You know."

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"Sure I know." He walked toward the pond, and me with him. I felt Page Jarrett's grape-green eyes digging our backs. The pond water was shiny tarry black from reflecting the clouds. "Sure," he said, "I know a right much. You natural human folks, you know so pitiful little I'm sorry for you."

"Why not teach us?" I wondered him, and he snorted like a big mean horse.

"Ain't the way it's reckoned to be, John. Giants are figured stupid. Remember the tales? Your name's John — do you call to mind a tale about a man named Jack, long back in time?"

"Jack the Giant Killer," I nodded. "He trapped a giant in a hole —"

"Cormoran," said Rafe. "Jack dug a pit in front of his door. And Blunderbore he tricked into stabbing himself open with a knife. But how did them things happen? He blew a trumpet to tole Cormoran out, and he sat and ate at Blunderbore's table like a friend before tricking him to death." A louder snort. "More foul fighting, John. Did you come up here to be Jack the Giant Killer? Got some dirty tricks? If that's how it is, you done drove your ducks to the wrong puddle."

"More than a puddle here," I said, looking at the clouds and then across the pond. "See younder, Rafe, where the water edge comes above that little slanty slope. If it was open, enough water could run off to keep the Notch from flooding."

"Could be done," he nodded his big head, "if you had machinery to pull the rocks out. But they're bigger than them fall rocks, they ain't half washed away to begin with. And there ain't no machinery, so just forget it. The Notch washes out, with most of the folks living in it — all of them, if the devil bids high enough. Sing me a song."

I swept the strings with my thumb. "Thinking about John Henry," I said, half to myself. "He wouldn't need a machine to open up a drain-off place yonder."

"How'd he do it?" asked Rafe.

"He had a hammer twice the size ary other man swung," I said. "He drove steel when they cut the Big Bend Tunnel through Cruze Mountain. Out-drove the steam drill they brought to compete him out of his job."

"Steam drill," Rafe repeated me, the way you'd think he was faintly recollecting the tale. "They'd do that — ordinary size folks, trying to work against a giant. How big was John Henry?"

"Heard tell he was the biggest man ever in Virginia."

"Big as me?"

"Maybe not quite. Maybe just stronger."

"Stronger!"

I had my work cut out not to run from the anger in Rafe Enoch's face.

"Well," I said, "he beat the steam drill. . . ."

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John Henry said to his captain,
"A man ain't nothing but a man,
But before I let that steam drill
run me down,
I'll die with this hammer in my
hand. . . ."

"He'd die trying," said Rafe, and his ears were sort of cocked forward, the way you hear elephants do to listen.

"He'd die winning," I said, and sang the next verse:

John Henry drove steel that long
day through,
The steam drill failed by his side.
The mountain was high, the sun
was low,
John he laid down his hammer
and he died. . . .

"Killed himself beating the drill!" and Rafe's pumpkin fist banged into his other palm. "Reckon I could have beat it and lived!"

I was looking at the place where the pond could have a drain-off.

"No," said Rafe. "Even if I wanted to, I don't have no hammer twice the size of other folks' hammers."

A drop of rain fell on me. I started around the pond.

"Where you going?" Rafe called, but I didn't look back. Stopped beside the wigwam-house and put my guitar inside. It was gloomy in there, but I saw his home-made stool as high as a table, his table almost chin high to a natural man, a bed woven of hickory splits and spread with bear and deer skins to be the right bed for Og, King of Bashan, in the Book of Joshua. Next to the door I grabbed up a big pole of hickory, off some stacked firewood.

"Where you going?" he called again.

I went to where the slope started. I poked my hickory between two rocks and started to pry. He laughed, and rain sprinkled down.

"Go on, John," he granted me. "Grub out a sluiceway there. I like to watch little scrabbly men work. Come in the house, Page, we'll watch him from in there."

I couldn't budge the rocks from each other. They were big — like trunks or grain sacks, and must have weighed in the half-tons. They were set in there, one next to the other, four-five of them holding the water back from pouring down that slope. I heaved on my hickory till it bent like a bow.

"Come on," said Rafe again, and I looked around in time to see him put out his shovel hand and take her by the wrist. Gentlemen, the way she slapped him with her other hand it made me jump with the crack.

I watched, knee deep in water. He put his hand to his gold-bearded cheek and his eye-whites glittered in the rain.

"If you was a man," he boomed down at Page, "I'd slap you dead."

"Do it!" she blazed him back. "I'm a woman, and I don't fear you

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or ary overgrown, sorry-for-himself giant ever drew breath!"

With me standing far enough off to forget how little I was by them, they didn't seem too far apart in size. Page was like a small-made woman facing up to a sizable man, that was all.

"If you was a man — " he began again.

"I'm no man, nor neither ain't you a man!" she cut off. "Don't know if you're an ape or a bull-brute or what, but you're no man! John's the only man here, and I'm helping him! Stop me if you dare!"

She ran to where I was. Rain battered her hair into a brown tumble and soaked her dress snug against her fine proud strong body. Into the water she splashed.

"Let me pry," and she grabbed the hickory pole. "I'll pry up and you tug up, and maybe —"

I bent to grab the rock with my hands. Together we tried. Seemed to me the rock stirred a little, like the drowsy sleeper in the old song. Dragging at it, I felt the muscles strain and crackle in my shoulders and arms.

"Look out!" squealed Page. "Here he comes!"

Up on the bank she jumped again, with the hickory ready to club at him. He paid her no mind, she stooped down toward where I was.

"Get on out of there!" he bellowed, the way I've always reckoned a buffalo bull might do. "Get out!"

"But — but — " I was wheezing. "Somebody's got to move this rock —"

"You ain't budging it ary mite!" he almost deafened me in the ear. "Get out and let somebody there can do something!"

He grabbed my arm and snatched me out of the water, so sudden I almost sprained my fingers letting go the rock. Next second he jumped in, with a splash like a jolt-wagon going off a bridge. His big shovelly hands clamped the sides of the rock, and through the falling rain I saw him heave.

He swole up like a mad toad-frog. His patchy fur shirt split down the middle of his back while those muscles humped under his skin. His teeth flashed out in his beard, set hard together.

Then, just when I thought he'd bust open, that rock came out of its bed, came up in the air, landing on the bank away from where it'd been.

"I swear, Rafe —" I began to say.

"Help him," Page put in. "Let's both help."

We scrabbled for a hold on the rock, but Rafe hollered us away, so loud and sharp we jumped back like scared dogs. I saw that rock quiver, and cracks ran through the rain-soaked dirt around it. Then it came up on end, the way you'd think it had hinges, and Rafe got both arms around it and heaved it clear. He laughed, with the rain wet in his beard.

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Standing clear where he'd told her to stand, Page pointed to the falls' end.

Looked as if the rain hadn't had to put down but just a little bit. Those loose rocks trembled and shifted in their places. They were ready to go. Then Rafe saw what we saw.

"Run, you two!" he howled above that racketty storm. "Run, run — quick!"

I didn't tarry to ask the reason. I grabbed Page's arm and we ran toward the falls. Running, I looked back past my elbow.

Rafe had straightened up, straddling among the rocks by the slope. He looked into the clouds, that were almost resting on his shaggy head, and both his big arms lifted and his hands spread and then their fingers snapped. I could hear the snaps — *Whop! Whop!* like two pistol shots.

He got what he called for, a forked stroke of lightning, straight and hard down on him like a fish-gig in the hands of the Lord's top angel. It slammed down on Rafe and over and around him, and it shook itself all the way from rock to clouds. Rafe Enoch in its grip lit up and glowed, the way you'd think he'd been forge-hammered out of iron and heated red in a furnace to temper him.

I heard the almightiest tearing noise I ever could call for. I felt the rock shelf quiver all the way to where we'd stopped dead to watch. My thought was, the falls had torn open and the Notch was drowning.

But the lightning yanked back to where it had come from. It had opened the sluiceway, and water flooded through and down slope, and Rafe had fallen down while it poured and puddled over him.

"He's struck dead!" I heard Page say over the rain.

"No," I said back.

For Rafe Enoch was on his knees, on his feet, and out of that drain-off rush, somehow staggering up from the flat sprawl where the lightning had flung him. His knees wobbled and bucked, but he drew them up straight and mopped a big muddy hand across his big muddy face.

He came walking toward us, slow and dreamy-moving, and by now the rain rushed down instead of fell down. It was like what my old folks used to call raining tomcats and hoe handles. I bowed my head to it, and made to pull Page toward Rafe's wigwam; but she wouldn't pull, she held where she was, till Rafe came up with us. Then, all three, we went together and got into the tight, dark shelter of the wigwam-house, with the rain and wind battering the outside of it.

Rafe and I sat on the big bed, and Page on a stool, looking small there. She wrung the water out of her hair.

"You all right?" she inquired Rafe.

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I looked at him. Between the drain-off and the wigwam, rain had washed off that mud that gaumed all over him. He was wet and clean, with his patch-pelt shirt hanging away from his big chest and shoulders in soggy rags.

The lightning had singed off part of his beard. He lifted big fingers to wipe off the wet, fluffy ash, and I saw the stripe on his naked arm, on the broad back of his hand, and I made out another stripe just like it on the other. Lightning had slammed down both hands and arms, and clear down his flanks and legs — I saw the burnt lines on his fringed leggings. It was like a double lash of God's whip.

Page got off the stool and came close to him. Just then he didn't look so out-and-out much bigger than she was. She put a long gentle finger on that lightning lash where it ran along his shoulder.

"Does it hurt?" she asked. "You got some grease I could put on it?"

He lifted his head, heavy, but didn't look at her. He looked at me. "I lied to you all," he said.

"Lied to us?" I asked him.

"I did call for the rain. Called for the biggest rain I ever thought of. Didn't pure down want to kill off the folks in the Notch, but to my reckoning, if I made it rain, and saved Page up here —"

At last he looked at her, with a shamed face.

"The others would be gone and forgotten. There'd be Page and me." His dark eyes grabbed her green ones. "But I didn't rightly know how she disgusts the sight of me." His head dropped again. "I feel the nearest to nothing I ever did."

"You opened the drain-off and saved the Notch from your rain," put in Page, her voice so gentle you'd never think it. "Called down the lightning to help you."

"Called down the lightning to kill me," said Rafe. "I never reckoned it wouldn't. I wanted to die. I want to die now."

"Live," she bade him.

He got up at that, standing tall over her.

"Don't worry when folks look on you, she said, her voice still ever so gentle. "They're just wondered at you, Rafe. Folks were wondered that same way at Saint Christopher, the giant who carried Lord Jesus across the river."

"I was too proud," he mumbled in his big bull throat. "Proud of my Genesis giant blood, of being one of the sons of God —"

"Shoo, Rafe," and her voice was gentler still, "the least man in size you'd call for, when he speaks to God, he says, 'Our Father.' "

Rafe turned from her.

"You said I could look on you if I wanted," said Page Jarrett. "And I want."

Back he turned, and bent down, and she rose on her toetips so their faces came together.

The rain stopped, the way you'd

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think that stopped it. But they never seemed to know it, and I picked up my guitar and went out toward the lip of the cliff.

The falls were going strong, but the drain-off handled enough water so there'd be no washout to drown the folks below. I reckoned the rocks would be the outdoingist slippery rocks ever climbed down by mortal man, and it would take me a long time. Long enough, maybe so, for me to think out the right way to tell Mr. Lane Jarrett he was just before having himself a son-in-law of the Genesis giant blood, and pretty soon after while, grandchildren of the same strain.

The sun came stabbing through the clouds and flung them away in chunks to right and left, across the bright blue sky.

Coming Next Month

Our next issue, on the stands in early June, will feature a short novel by Philip José Farmer, *Father* — a strange tale of deadly peril among the stars and inside man's soul, solved by that cheerfully human interstellar priest, John Carmody (whom you'll remember from Farmer's *Attitudes*). There'll also be the latest and one of the most original of the stories of Arthur C. Clarke, whose EARTHLIGHT is easily the year's best s.f. novel to date; a haunting and unclassifiable tale by Zenna Henderson; the rediscovery of a forgotten fantasy by MATRIARCH-novelist G. B. Stern; and a very special treat: the first appearance anywhere of a long fantasy-ballad by America's foremost creator of light verse, the immortal Ogden Nash.

An F&SF Extra! Don't miss the $200 Title Contest story in next month's issue!

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"It is nothing short of tragic," I observed to Poul Anderson, "that P. G. Wodehouse has never written any science fiction." To this rash and inaccurate statement, Mr. Anderson's reply was to reach past the Siamese kitten and under the Pogomobile to his bookshelf, produce a well-worn volume, and generously thrust it upon me. The volume was MEET MR. MULLINER, *opened at the story you are about to read — in which you will meet that most weightily sinister of baronets, Sir Jasper ffinch-ffarrowmere, and learn what woes may betide a young man (be he ever so far removed from our usual concept of the Mad Scientist) who seeks to tamper with the Secrets of Nature.*

A Slice of Life

by P. G. WODEHOUSE

THE CONVERSATION IN THE BAR-parlour of the Anglers' Rest had drifted round to the subject of the Arts: and somebody asked if that film-serial, *The Vicissitudes of Vera*, which they were showing down at the Bijou Dream, was worth seeing.

"It's very good," said Miss Postlethwaite, our courteous and efficient barmaid, who is a prominent first-nighter. "It's about this mad professor who gets this girl into his toils and tries to turn her into a lobster."

"Tries to turn her into a lobster?" echoed we, surprised.

"Yes, sir. Into *a* lobster. It seems he collected thousands and thousands of lobsters and mashed them up and boiled down the juice from their glands and was just going to inject it into this Vera Dalrymple's spinal column when Jack Frobisher broke into the house and stopped him."

"Why did he do that?"

"Because he didn't want the girl he loved to be turned into a lobster."

"What we mean," said we, "is why did the professor want to turn the girl into a lobster?"

"He had a grudge against her."

This seemed plausible, and we thought it over for a while. Then one of the company shook his head disapprovingly.

"I don't like stories like that," he said. "They aren't true to life."

"Pardon me, sir," said a voice. And we were aware of Mr. Mulliner.

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"Excuse me interrupting what may be a private discussion," said Mr. Mulliner, "but I chanced to overhear the recent remarks, and you, sir, have opened up a subject on which I happen to hold strong views — to wit, the question of what is and what is not true to life. How can we, with our limited experience, answer that question? For all we know, at this very moment hundreds of young women all over the country may be in the process of being turned into lobsters. Forgive my warmth, but I have suffered a good deal from this sceptical attitude of mind which is so prevalent nowadays. I have even met people who refused to believe my story about my brother Wilfred, purely because it was a little out of the ordinary run of the average man's experience."

Considerably moved, Mr. Mulliner ordered a hot scotch with a slice of lemon.

"What happened to your brother Wilfred? Was he turned into a lobster?"

"No," said Mr. Mulliner, fixing his honest blue eyes on the speaker, "he was not. It would be perfectly easy for me to pretend that he was turned into a lobster; but I have always made it a practice — and I always shall make it a practice — to speak nothing but the bare truth. My brother Wilfred simply had rather a curious adventure."

My brother Wilfred (said Mr. Mulliner) is the clever one of the family. Even as a boy he was always messing about with chemicals, and at the University he devoted his time entirely to research. The result was that while still quite a young man he had won an established reputation as the inventor of what are known to the trade as Mulliner's Magic Marvels — a general term embracing the Raven Gipsy Face-Cream, the Snow of the Mountains Lotion, and many other preparations, some designed exclusively for the toilet, others of a curative nature, intended to alleviate the many ills to which the flesh is heir.

Naturally, he was a very busy man: and it is to this absorption in his work that I attribute the fact that, though — like all the Mulliners — a man of striking personal charm, he had reached his thirty-first year without ever having been involved in an affair of the heart. I remember him telling me once that he simply had no time for girls.

But we all fall sooner or later, and these strong concentrated men harder than any. While taking a brief holiday one year at Cannes, he met a Miss Angela Purdue, who was staying at his hotel, and she bowled him over completely.

She was one of these jolly, outdoor girls; and Wilfred had told me that what attracted him first about her was her wholesome, sunburned complexion. In fact, he told Miss Purdue the same thing when, shortly after he had proposed and been accepted, she asked him in her girlish way what

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it was that had first made him begin to love her.

"It's such a pity," said Miss Purdue, "that sunburn fades so soon. I do wish I knew some way of keeping it."

Even in his moments of holiest emotion Wilfred never forgot that he was a business man.

"You should try Mulliner's Raven Gipsy Face-Cream," he said. "It comes in two sizes — the small (or half-crown) jar and the large jar at seven shillings and sixpence. The large jar contains three and a half times as much as the small jar. It is applied nightly with a small sponge before retiring to rest. Testimonials have been received from numerous members of the aristocracy and may be examined at the office by any bona-fide inquirer."

"Is it really good?"

"I invented it," said Wilfred.

She looked at him adoringly.

"How clever you are! Any girl ought to be proud to marry you."

"Oh, well," said Wilfred, with a modest wave of his hand.

"All the same, my guardian is going to be terribly angry when I tell him we're engaged."

"Why?"

"I inherited the Purdue millions when my uncle died, you see, and my guardian has always wanted me to marry his son, Percy."

Wilfred kissed her fondly, and laughed a defiant laugh.

"Jer mong feesh der selar," he said lightly.

But, some days after his return to London, whither the girl had preceded him, he had occasion to recall her words. As he sat in his study, musing on a preparation to cure the pip in canaries, a card was brought to him.

"Sir Jasper ffinch-ffarrowmere, Bart.," he read. The name was strange to him.

"Show the gentleman in," he said. And presently there entered a very stout man with a broad pink face. It was a face whose natural expression should, Wilfred felt, have been jovial, but at the moment it was grave.

"Sir Jasper Finch-Farrowmere?" said Wilfred.

"ffinch-ffarrowmere," corrected the visitor, his sensitive ear detecting the capital letters.

"Ah, yes. You spell it with two small f's."

"Four small f's."

"And to what do I owe the honour —"

"I am Angela Purdue's guardian."

"How do you do? A whisky-and-soda?"

"I thank you, no. I am a total abstainer. I found that alcohol had a tendency to increase my weight, so I gave it up. I have also given up butter, potatoes, soups of all kinds, and — However," he broke off, the fanatic gleam which comes into the eyes of all fat men who are describing their system of diet fading away, "this is not a social call, and I must not take up your time with idle

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talk. I have a message for you, Mr. Mulliner. From Angela."

"Bless her!" said Wilfred. "Sir Jasper, I love that girl with a fervour which increases daily."

"Is that so?" said the baronet. "Well, what I came to say was, it's all off."

"What?"

"All off. She sent me to say that she had thought it over and wanted to break the engagement."

Wilfred's eyes narrowed. He had not forgotten what Angela had said about this man wanting her to marry his son. He gazed piercingly at his visitor, no longer deceived by the superficial geniality of his appearance. He had read too many detective stories where the fat, jolly, red-faced man turns out a fiend in human shape to be a ready victim to appearances.

"Indeed?" he said, coldly. "I should prefer to have this information from Miss Purdue's own lips."

"She won't see you. But, anticipating this attitude on your part, I brought a letter from her. You recognise the writing?"

Wilfred took the letter. Certainly, the hand was Angela's, and the meaning of the words he read unmistakable. Nevertheless, as he handed the missive back, there was a hard smile on his face.

"There is such a thing as writing a letter under compulsion," he said.

The baronet's pink face turned mauve.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"What I say."

"Are you insinuating —"

"Yes, I am."

"Pooh, sir!"

"Pooh to you!" said Wilfred. "And, if you want to know what I think, you poor ffish, I believe your name is spelled with a capital F, like anybody else's."

Stung to the quick, the baronet turned on his heel and left the room without another word.

Although he had given up his life to chemical research, Wilfred Mulliner was no mere dreamer. He could be the man of action when necessity demanded. Scarcely had his visitor left when he was on his way to the Senior Test-Tubes, the famous chemists' club in St. James's. There, consulting Kelly's *County Families*, he learnt that Sir Jasper's address was ffinch Hall in Yorkshire. He had found out all he wanted to know. It was at ffinch Hall, he decided, that Angela must now be immured.

For that she was being immured somewhere he had no doubt. That letter, he was positive, had been written by her under stress of threats. The writing was Angela's but he declined to believe that she was responsible for the phraseology and sentiments. He remembered reading a story where the heroine was forced into courses which she would not otherwise have contemplated by the fact that somebody was standing over her with a flask of vitriol. Possibly this was what that bounder of a baronet had done.

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Considering this possibility, he did not blame her for what she had said about him, Wilfred, in the second paragraph of her note. Nor did he reproach her for signing herself "Yrs truly, A. Purdue." Naturally, when baronets are threatening to pour vitriol down her neck, a refined and sensitive young girl cannot pick her words. This sort of thing must of necessity interfere with the selection of the *mot juste*.

That afternoon, Wilfred was in a train on his way to Yorkshire. That evening, he was in the ffinch Arms in the village of which Sir Jasper was the squire. That night, he was in the gardens of ffinch Hall, prowling softly round the house, listening.

And presently, as he prowled, there came to his ears from an upper window a sound that made him stiffen like a statue and clench his hands till the knuckles stood out white under the strain.

It was the sound of a woman sobbing.

Wilfred spent a sleepless night, but by morning he had formed his plan of action. I will not weary you with a description of the slow and tedious steps by which he first made the acquaintance of Sir Jasper's valet, who was an habitué of the village inn, and then by careful stages won the man's confidence with friendly words and beer. Suffice it to say that, about a week later, Wilfred had induced this man with bribes to leave suddenly on the plea of an aunt's illness, supplying — so as to cause his employer no inconvenience — a cousin to take his place.

This cousin, as you will have guessed, was Wilfred himself. But a very different Wilfred from the dark-haired, clean-cut young scientist who had revolutionised the world of chemistry a few months before by proving that H_2O + b3g4z7 − m9z8 = g6f5p3x. Before leaving London on what he knew would be a dark and dangerous enterprise, Wilfred had taken the precaution of calling in at a well-known costumier's and buying a red wig. He had also purchased a pair of blue spectacles: but for the *rôle* which he had now undertaken these were, of course, useless. A blue-spectacled valet could not but have aroused suspicion in the most guileless baronet. All that Wilfred did, therefore, in the way of preparation, was to don the wig, shave off his moustache, and treat his face to a light coating of the Raven Gipsy Face-Cream. This done, he set out for ffinch Hall.

Externally, ffinch Hall was one of those gloomy, sombre country-houses which seem to exist only for the purpose of having horrid crimes committed in them. Even in his brief visit to the grounds, Wilfred had noticed fully half a dozen places which seemed incomplete without a cross indicating spot where body was found by the police. It was the sort of house where ravens croak in in the front garden just before the

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death of the heir, and shrieks ring out from behind barred windows in the night.

Nor was its interior more cheerful. And, as for the personnel of the domestic staff, that was less exhilarating than anything else about the place. It consisted of an aged cook who, as she bent over her cauldrons, looked like something out of a travelling company of *Macbeth*, touring the smaller towns of the North, and Murgatroyd, the butler, a huge, sinister man with a cast in one eye and an evil light in the other.

Many men, under these conditions, would have been daunted. But not Wilfred Mulliner. Apart from the fact that, like all the Mulliners, he was as brave as a lion, he had come expecting something of this nature. He settled down to his duties and kept his eyes open, and before long his vigilance was rewarded.

One day, as he lurked about the dim-lit passage-ways, he saw Sir Jasper coming up the stairs with a laden tray in his hands. It contained a toast-rack, a half bot. of white wine, pepper, salt, veg., and in a covered dish something which Wilfred, sniffing cautiously, decided was a cutlet.

Lurking in the shadows, he followed the baronet to the top of the house. Sir Jasper paused at a door on the second floor. He knocked. The door opened, a hand was stretched forth, the tray vanished, the door closed, and the baronet left.

So did Wilfred. He had seen what he had wanted to see, discovered what he had wanted to discover. He returned to the servants' hall, and under the gloomy eyes of Murgatroyd began to shape his plans.

"Where you been?" demanded the butler, suspiciously.

"Oh, hither and thither," said Wilfred, with a well-assumed airiness.

Murgatroyd directed a menacing glance at him.

"You'd better stay where you belong," he said, in his thick, growling voice. "There's things in this house that don't want seeing."

"Ah!" agreed the cook, dropping an onion in the cauldron.

Wilfred could not repress a shudder.

But, even as he shuddered, he was conscious of a certain relief. At least, he reflected, they were not starving his darling. That cutlet had smelt uncommonly good: and, if the bill of fare was always maintained at this level, she had nothing to complain of in the catering.

But his relief was short-lived. What, after all, he asked himself, are cutlets to a girl who is imprisoned in a locked room of a sinister country-house and is being forced to marry a man she does not love? Practically nothing. When the heart is sick, cutlets merely alleviate, they do not cure. Fiercely Wilfred told himself that, come what might, few days should pass before he found the key to that locked door and bore

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away his love to freedom and happiness.

The only obstacle in the way of this scheme was that it was plainly going to be a matter of the greatest difficulty to find the key. That night, when his employer dined, Wilfred searched his room thoroughly. He found nothing. The key, he was forced to conclude, was kept on the baronet's person.

Then how to secure it?

It is not too much to say that Wilfred Mulliner was nonplussed. The brain which had electrified the world of Science by discovering that if you mixed a stiffish oxygen and potassium and added a splash of trinitrotoluol and a spot of old brandy you got something that could be sold in America as champagne at a hundred and fifty dollars the case, had to confess itself baffled.

To attempt to analyse the young man's emotions, as the next week dragged itself by, would be merely morbid. Life cannot, of course, be all sunshine: and in relating a story like this, which is a slice of life, one must pay as much attention to shade as to light: nevertheless, it would be tedious were I to describe to you in detail the soul-torments which afflicted Wilfred Mulliner as day followed day and no solution to the problem presented itself. You are all intelligent men, and you can picture to yourselves how a high-spirited young fellow, deeply in love, must have felt; knowing that the girl he loved was languishing in what practically amounted to a dungeon, though situated on an upper floor, and chafing at his inability to set her free.

His eyes became sunken. His cheek-bones stood out. He lost weight. And so noticeable was this change in his physique that Sir Jasper ffinch-ffarrowmere commented on it one evening in tones of unconcealed envy.

"How the devil, Straker," he said — for this was the pseudonym under which Wilfred was passing, "do you manage to keep so thin? Judging by the weekly books, you eat like a starving Esquimau, and yet you don't put on weight. Now I, in addition to knocking off butter and potatoes, have started drinking hot unsweetened lemon-juice each night before retiring: and yet, damme," he said — for, like all baronets, he was careless in his language, "I weighed myself this morning, and I was up another six ounces. What's the explanation?"

"Yes, Sir Jasper," said Wilfred, mechanically.

"What the devil do you mean, Yes, Sir Jasper?"

"No, Sir Jasper."

The baronet wheezed plaintively.

"I've been studying this matter closely," he said, "and it's one of the seven wonders of the world. Have you ever seen a fat valet? Of course not. Nor has anybody else. There is no such thing as a fat valet. And yet there is scarcely a moment during the day when a valet is not eating.

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He rises at six-thirty, and at seven is having coffee and buttered toast. At eight, he breakfasts off porridge, cream, eggs, bacon, jam, bread, butter, more eggs, more bacon, more jam, more tea, and more butter, finishing up with a slice of cold ham and a sardine. At eleven o'clock he has his 'elevenses," consisting of coffee, cream, more bread and more butter. At one, luncheon — a hearty meal, replete with every form of starchy food and lots of beer. If he can get at the port, he has port. At three, a snack. At four, another snack. At five, tea and buttered toast. At seven — dinner, probably with floury potatoes, and certainly with lots more beer. At nine, another snack. And at ten-thirty he retires to bed, taking with him a glass of milk and a plate of biscuits to keep himself from getting hungry in the night. And yet he remains as slender as a string bean, while I, who have been dieting for years, tip the beam at two hundred and seventeen pounds, and am growing a third and supplementary chin. These are mysteries, Straker."

"Yes, Sir Jasper."

"Well, I'll tell you one thing," said the baronet, "I'm getting down one of those indoor Turkish Bath cabinet-affairs from London; and if that doesn't do the trick, I give up the struggle."

The indoor Turkish Bath duly arrived and was unpacked; and it was some three nights later that Wilfred, brooding in the servants' hall, was aroused from his reverie by Murgatroyd.

"Here," said Murgatroyd, "wake up. Sir Jasper's calling you."

"Calling me what?" asked Wilfred, coming to himself with a start.

"Calling you very loud," growled the butler.

It was indeed so. From the upper regions of the house there was proceeding a series of sharp yelps, evidently those of a man in mortal stress. Wilfred was reluctant to interfere in any way if, as seemed probable, his employer was dying in agony; but he was a conscientious man, and it was his duty, while in this sinister house, to perform the work for which he was paid. He hurried up the stairs; and, entering Sir Jasper's bedroom, perceived the baronet's crimson face protruding from the top of the indoor Turkish Bath.

"So you've come at last!" cried Sir Jasper. "Look here, when you put me into this infernal contrivance just now, what did you do to the dashed thing?"

"Nothing beyond what was indicated in the printed pamphlet accompanying the machine, Sir Jasper. Following the instructions, I slid Rod A into Groove B, fastening with Catch C —"

"Well, you must have made a mess of it, somehow. The thing's stuck. I can't get out."

"You can't?" cried Wilfred.

"No. And the bally apparatus is

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getting considerably hotter than the hinges of the Inferno." I must apologize for Sir Jasper's language, but you know what baronets are. "I'm being cooked to a crisp."

A sudden flash of light seemed to blaze upon Wilfred Mulliner.

"I will release you, Sir Jasper —"

"Well, hurry up, then."

"On one condition." Wilfred fixed him with a piercing gaze. "First, I must have the key."

"There isn't a key, you idiot. It doesn't lock. It just clicks when you slide Gadget D into Thingummybob E."

"The key I require is that of the room in which you are holding Angela Purdue a prisoner."

"What the devil do you mean? Ouch!"

"I will tell you what I mean, Sir Jasper ffinch-ffarrowmere. I am Wilfred Mulliner!"

"Don't be an ass. Wilfred Mulliner has black hair. Yours is red. You must be thinking of someone else."

"This is a wig," said Wilfred. "By Clarkson." He shook a menacing finger at the baronet. "You little thought, Sir Jasper ffinch-ffarrowmere, when you embarked on this dastardly scheme, that Wilfred Mulliner was watching your every move. I guessed your plans from the start. And now is the moment when I checkmate them. Give me that key, you Fiend."

"ffiend," corrected Sir Jasper, automatically.

"I am going to release my darling, to take her away from this dreadful house, to marry her by special licence as soon as it can legally be done."

In spite of his sufferings, a ghastly laugh escaped Sir Jasper's lips.

"You are, are you!"

"I am."

"Yes, you are!"

"Give me the key."

"I haven't got it, you chump. It's in the door."

"Ha, ha!"

"It's no good saying 'Ha, ha!' It is in the door. On Angela's side of the door."

"A likely story! But I cannot stay here wasting time. If you will not give me the key, I shall go up and break in the door."

"Do!" Once more the baronet laughed like a tortured soul. "And see what she'll say."

Wilfred could make nothing of this last remark. He could, he thought, imagine very clearly what Angela would say. He could picture her sobbing on his chest, murmuring that she knew he sould come, that she had never doubted him for an instant. He leapt for the door.

"Here! Hi! Aren't you going to let me out?"

"Presently," said Wilfred. "Keep cool." He raced up the stairs.

"Angela," he cried, pressing his lips against the panel. "Angela!"

"Who's that?" answered a well-remembered voice from within.

"It is I — Wilfred. I am going to burst open the door. Stand clear of the gates."

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He drew back a few paces, and hurled himself at the woodwork. There was a grinding crash, as the lock gave. And Wilfred, staggering on, found himself in a room so dark that he could see nothing.

"Angela, where are you?"

"I'm here. And I'd like to know why you are, after that letter I wrote you. Some men," continued the strangely cold voice, "do not seem to know how to take a hint."

Wilfred staggered, and would have fallen had he not clutched at his forehead.

"That letter?" he stammered. "You surely didn't mean what you wrote in that letter?"

"I meant every word and I wish I had put in more."

"But — but — but —. But don't you love me, Angela?"

A hard, mocking laugh rang through the room.

"Love you? Love the man who recommended me to try Mulliner's Raven Gipsy Face-Cream!"

"What do you mean?"

"I will tell you what I mean. Wilfred Mulliner, look on your handiwork!"

The room became suddenly flooded with light. And there, standing with her hand on the switch, stood Angela — a queenly, lovely figure, in whose radiant beauty the sternest critic would have noted but one flaw — the fact that she was piebald.

Wilfred gazed at her with adoring eyes. Her face was partly brown and partly white, and on her snowy neck were patches of sepia that looked like the thumb-prints you find on the pages of books in the Free Library: but he thought her the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. He longed to fold her in his arms: and but for the fact that her eyes told him that she would undoubtedly land an uppercut on him if he tried it he would have done so.

"Yes," she went on, "this is what you have made of me, Wilfred Mulliner — you and that awful stuff you call the Raven Gipsy Face-Cream. This is the skin you loved to touch! I took your advice and bought one of the large jars at seven and six, and see the result! Barely twenty-four hours after the first application, I could have walked into any circus and named my own terms as the Spotted Princess of the Fiji Islands. I fled here to my childhood home, to hide myself. And the first thing that happened" — her voice broke — "was that my favourite hunter shied at me and tried to bite pieces out of his manger: while Ponto, my little dog, whom I have reared from a puppy, caught one sight of my face and is now in the hands of the vet. and unlikely to recover. And it was you, Wilfred Mulliner, who brought this curse upon me."

Many men would have wilted beneath these searing words, but Wilfred Mulliner merely smiled with infinite compassion and understanding.

"It is quite all right," he said. "I

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should have warned you, sweetheart, that this occasionally happens in cases where the skin is exceptionally delicate and finely textured. It can be speedily remedied by an application of the Mulliner Snow of the Mountains Lotion, four shillings the medium-sized bottle."

"Wilfred! Is this true?"

"Perfectly true, dearest. And is this all that stands between us?"

"No!" shouted a voice of thunder.

Wilfred wheeled sharply. In the doorway stood Sir Jasper ffinch-ffarrowmere. He was swathed in a bath-towel, what was visible of his person being a bright crimson. Behind him, toying with a horse-whip, stood Murgatroyd, the butler.

"You didn't expect to see me, did you?"

"I certainly," replied Wilfred, severely, "did not expect to see you in a lady's presence in a costume like that."

"Never mind my costume." Sir Jasper turned.

"Murgatroyd, do your duty!"

The butler, scowling horribly, advanced into the room.

"Stop!" screamed Angela.

"I haven't begun yet, miss," said the butler, deferentially.

"You sha'n't touch Wilfred. I love him."

"What!" cried Sir Jasper. "After all that has happened?"

"Yes. He has explained everything."

A grim frown appeared on the baronet's vermilion face.

"I'll bet he hasn't explained why he left me to be cooked in that infernal Turkish Bath. I was beginning to throw out clouds of smoke when Murgatroyd, faithful fellow, heard my cries and came and released me."

"Though not my work," added the butler.

Wilfred eyed him steadily.

"If," he said, "you used Mulliner's Reduc-o, the recognised specific for obesity, whether in the tabloid form at three shillings the tin, or as a liquid at five and six the flask, you would have no need to stew in Turkish Baths. Mulliner's Reduc-o, which contains no injurious chemicals, but is compounded purely of health-giving herbs, is guaranteed to remove excess weight, steadily and without weakening after-effects, at the rate of two pounds a week. As used by the nobility."

The glare of hatred faded from the baronet's eyes.

"Is that a fact?" he whispered.

"It is."

"You guarantee it?"

"All the Mulliner preparations are fully guaranteed."

"My boy!" cried the baronet. He shook Wilfred by the hand. "Take her," he said, brokenly. "And with her my b-blessing."

A discreet cough sounded in the background.

"You haven't anything, by any chance, sir," asked Murgatroyd, "that's good for lumbago?"

"Mulliner's Ease-o will cure the

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most stubborn case in six days."

"Bless you, sir, bless you," sobbed Murgatroyd. "Where can I get it?"

"At all chemists."

"It catches me in the small of the back principally, sir."

"It need catch you no longer," said Wilfred.

There is little to add. Murgatroyd is now the most lissom butler in Yorkshire. Sir Jasper's weight is down under the fifteen stone and he is thinking of taking up hunting again. Wilfred and Angela are man and wife; and never, I am informed, have the wedding-bells of the old church at ffinch village rung out a blither peal than they did on that June morning when Angela, raising to her love a face on which the brown was as evenly distributed as on an antique walnut table, replied to the clergyman's question, "Wilt thou, Angela, take this Wilfred?" with a shy, "I will." They now have two bonny bairns — the small, or Percival, at a preparatory school in Sussex, and the large, or Ferdinand, at Eton.

Here Mr. Mulliner, having finished his hot scotch, bade us farewell and took his departure.

A silence followed his exit. The company seemed plunged in deep thought. Then somebody rose.

"Well, good night all," he said.

It seemed to sum up the situation.

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Once or twice in a writer's lifetime, a story comes into being full-grown, apparently out of nowhere, writes itself effortlessly in a single session, and sells to the first market that sees it. (O si sic omnia . . . !) *Ray Bradbury's* Zero Hour (*so Bradbury tells me*) *is one example; my own* Nine-Finger Jack *is another; and a third is this mordant little note on the psychology of collectors by Charles Beaumont — who continues to establish himself more firmly with each story as one of the most happily unclassifiable individuals now contributing to science-fantasy.*

The New Sound

by CHARLES BEAUMONT

OF ALL THE SQUIRRELS IN A WORLD full of squirrels Mr. Goodhew was by far the squirreliest. That is, he collected things. But whereas once it had been masks and postage stamps and colored rocks and bits of twine, now he collected death. Vigorously, fanatically, lovingly. He would pluck it out of the air and seal it inside plastoid and listen to it at night. He would listen to death at night. It made him very happy.

But things were not always so. It had come by degrees, beginning with Mozart and Bach and ending with the mollusks and the bats — which was, of course, the real beginning. As a common audiophile he had filled his apartment with a mushroom growth of phonographs and speakers and attachments and he was kept busy reproducing fidelitously the *tutti* passages of the more violent composers. But then, one day, he happened to purchase an album entitled *A World of Sounds*. Its cover was of modern design and it had been manufactured in the interests of science. It contained such items as recordings of seals at play, the death cry of a wounded ibex and a horsefly's heartbeat. Bonus-wise it offered the sound of a squid thrashing in waters described as *lonely* and *unfathomable* and the somewhat unnerving (though not to Mr. Goodhew) chitter of a vampire bat.

Sounds, wonderful and strange; sounds you could get your teeth into, sounds like none he had ever heard . . .

Promptly he was lost and the collection was on its way.

It was crude at first, as all col-

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lections are: a higgledy-piggledy potpourri entirely without organization. Hasty purchase followed hasty purchase — today a windstorm over Reykjavik, tomorrow an alligator's yawn, the next day the weary groan of bordello couchsprings . . .

In time, however, Mr. Goodhew tired of such easily come by items and developed a less universal attitude: he narrowed his field. The purchases became less frequent and it was soon necessary for him to dip into capital — a commodity of which, fortunately, he enjoyed a plenitude owing to an inheritance left by his father who had been a used car salesman. He hired Sound Scouts to record the really bizarre, unusual, outré, the near-fantastic. But still, though interesting, the collection was not sufficiently homogenous to please Mr. Goodhew. He listened eveningly to the rustle of unborn infants, to the perspiration afall from thieves' foreheads, to the sound of trap doors swinging against gallows platforms, and he thought as he listened: I must specialize, yes, I must specialize!

But how? In what way?

He thought about it carefully, sorting, eliminating, eliminating. Then he called in his employees and gave them their orders.

It was at that moment that Mr. Goodhew became the first necro-audiophile.

Throwing out all but the death cry of the ibex, he attended scrupulously to his specialty. The first report brought him recordings of crushed mice, immolated earwigs, the gasps of a mongrel lying beneath two tons of truck — a very nice rudimentary start. He listened to them, catalogued them, cross-filed them and put them away. And waited.

He had not long to wait. Presently his apartment bulged with records, and the air was forever alive with the cries, groans, gasps, screams, screeches, whimpers and whines of sundry animals; all dying, each in a different way. Upon that point Mr. Goodhew stood adamant: there must be no repetitiousness.

And all went swimmingly until, for numerous reasons, he found it necessary to change quarters. For one thing, the apartment was becoming incommodious for his needs; for another, he was weary of making explanations to the neighbors and to the policemen summoned by the neighbors. He moved, records and all, to a redwood villa high upon the highest hill, and there he stayed.

And the collection grew. Despite world conditions, which could best be described as taut, each day's mail would bring from all corners something new: the death throes of an armadillo; the shrills, flutings and flutterings of a disemboweled canary; the hysterical hiss of an anaconda dropped into a wood stove . . . Mr. Goodhew had scarcely a moment free, so busy was he listening, filing, recording, processing:

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only in the evening could he fall into an easy chair, flip on the phonograph and actually enjoy his collection. Then the lights would be turned off and he would sit there, tense, expectant, mouth open, brain a moving image to the sounds. He would listen in the manner of many another collector fingering rare delft or polishing sea shells or putting first folios in line upon library shelves. And he was a true, a real collector, for he enjoyed every phase of it: the preparation, the labor, and, most important, the sounds themselves.

One day, however, after many years had passed, the inevitable happened. His specialty reached completion, or nearly that, very tragically nearly that. No species of animal existed of which at least one member had not died for Mr. Goodhew. He had them all. From aardvark to zebra, from the subaqueous leave-taking of a single cell to the room-filling choke of a giant whale. All there, in Mr. Goodhew's house, filed and stored: complete.

Except —

Once determined, Mr. Goodhew breathed as a prisoner granted pardon. It took adjusting, screwing up of the courage, but he was a collector and he could think of nothing worse than a collector with nothing to collect.

So it was settled.

The first batch arrived one week from the time of his decision. It contained one perfect jewel and several of declining quality. But that first! Mr. Goodhew listened to it again and again. He listened to the woman's scream as it echoed through the rooms of his house. What pain! What suffering! What *bel canto!*

She had been strangled, the Sound Scout — an extremely ambitious fellow — had explained, though failing to append any note regarding certain other details which occurred to, but did not overlong remain with, his employer. The rest was chaff, an unhappy mish-mash of hoots and bellows and throbbing guttural wrackings — all obviously spurious.

Which made Mr. Goodhew furious.

He discharged all the men save Mr. Hurke, who had presented him with the initial gem; and thenceforth the Sound Collection flourished — slowly, it is true, what with world tension, the bombs, et al., but quite surely.

At night now, Mr. Goodhew scarcely ever made reference to any of what he termed his Mesozoic period, preferring to concentrate on this latest phase of the collection. Into the weeest hours he would listen and thrill to the death rattles of stilettoed merchants, the last bubblings of drowned spinsters, the dry croaks of nonagenarians, the windcrushed screams of falling eunuchs . . . Terror and anguish and honesty, the sounds of honesty; of souls laid open — this is what he listened to.

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And surely, he thought, there is no limit to my collection now! A sound for every soul in a universe overrun with souls. It would last forever; he would go on collecting and collecting and —

On a humid evening high upon his hill Mr. Goodhew got up, walked over to his phonograph and snapped off the seven hundredth shriek of a university student who had yet three hundred to go (the Death of a Thousand Cuts — Mr. Hurke had instituted certain refinements). And so doing, Mr. Goodhew sighed, paced a bit and then proceeded to a hall mirror whereat he stood in contemplation for fifteen minutes. It was difficult to believe; almost, it seemed, impossible to believe. Yet, as he saw those eyes, those lines and wrinkles, that runny scratch of mouth, he knew it was true.

He had become jaded. He had been living off marginalia for years, and now he faced it: he was a Des Esseintes at the end of the trail. There were no more new sounds, none of any consequence, none to excite the smallest interest.

His collection was — complete.

He sighed again, and was alarmed at the sudden receipt of a highly whimsical idea. If it is complete, he thought, why then do I feel frustrated? Where is the satisfaction? No. It is *not* complete; there is yet one more, one last sound.

My own!

Nonsense. He spoke aloud now, even as he played with the special tape recorder. If I shoot myself or swallow prussic acid or what have you, and then play it back . . . but stop! That is ridiculous and, what is worse, it is grossly literary.

But if not his own death — which, as he reasoned, he would scarcely be able to enjoy afterwards — what then? He began to pace at a faster clip. Searching his mind. The New Sound, the Ultimate Sound, the only one he lacked . . .

Mr. Goodhew stamped his foot upon the Japanese floormat and flung himself onto a large divan and cogitated until his temples ached.

What could it be? What had he overlooked to account for this feeling of incompleteness?

It was at this point of chaotic frustration when thought unravels and trails into a knotted tangle that Mr. Goodhew felt the concussion. Like a silent explosion, the loosing of fantastic pressures, a vast cosmic hemorrhage, assailing the nerves of his body, causing him to roll onto the floor and blink.

What — He rose and rushed directly to the window, the east window which commanded an imperial view of the light-laced city. It was midnight. And yet, from afar, he could see the great inverted orange glow deepening, spreading in the sky like a drop of color in the transparent water of a fishbowl.

He watched it grow and thought about it. Thought about the alarm-

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ists and their perpetual pulings of world catclysm, the war, the C-Bomb, the O-Bomb —

The explosion began, a soft rumble of drums in the bloated black overhead clouds. Mr. Goodhew flinched and trembled as understanding came. Then he snapped his fingers and said of course; he sprang backward and raced to his recording apparatus, fastened the attachments set it all humming. Hurry, hurry! He brought the special microphone to the open window, held it high, tested it: One, Two, ThreeFour.

And then there was the ripping and the crashing and the thunder like no other thunder, loud, so loud, a frenzied tourbillon of sound — but still soft enough to permit the screams to wriggle through, like tiny frightened snakes.

Mr. Goodhew held the microphone high out the window and chuckled: even when the fires began, he chuckled. He breathed fast, waiting . . . A little more, a little longer, two more seconds: Now! He snapped a switch and watched the glistening tanness of tape hiss in fast reverse. He snapped another switch, stopping it.

Mr. Goodhew pressed the playback button and shivered in wild anticipatory glee.

Then the lights went out. He bent closer, listening — he craned his neck and conched his ears; and then he let loose one small strangulated cry of anguish. He shook the dead recorder and did not stop shaking it until the world had burst and split and blown away in a billion flaming specks.

He had missed it. He had missed the ultimate sound.

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Rather surprisingly, science fiction has largely neglected one of the most exciting aspects of science itself: the pure thrill, at once intellectual and emotional, of research, the tracking down of truth that becomes more vitally suspenseful than any detectival pursuit of clues to the identity of the most sinister criminal in the Galaxy. Chad Oliver, himself highly trained in anthropology and archeology, has used these sciences to bring a fresh reality into fiction, in his admirable novel SHADOWS IN THE SUN, *in a fine short story in the latest* STAR SCIENCE FICTION *anthology, and now in this enthralling tale of an archeologist confronting the enigma of a commonplace artifact . . . whose origin may change the history of mankind.*

Artifact

by CHAD OLIVER

LATE AUGUST, 1971.

Far above a field in New Mexico, above the blue sky itself, a ship decelerated and floated down toward the Earth. The close star that had seared through blackness lost its nakedness and became the golden sun. White clouds touched the ship that had come from emptiness.

Hundreds of miles away, across half the state of Texas, Dr. Dixon Sanders sat in his university office and looked out the window. The cool breeze felt good after a hot summer, and the August rains had stroked green across the land.

He did not know that man had landed on Mars for the first time.

He did not know what men had found there.

Three days later, Sanders got the call from Washington.

One hour after he had received the call, he climbed into a jet and was flown to a field in New Mexico. There was no spaceship in sight. He saw only a thick concrete blockhouse, two spidery structures that looked like radio towers, anti-aircraft missiles and sheds. There were jets patrolling the skies.

A copter lifted him four miles to a neat new settlement in the desert. The houses were white and compact, and concealed irrigation channels had turned the area into an oasis with green trees, grasses, vines and flowers. A big lettered roof sign read: WELCOME TO GILA MONSTER SINKHOLE. A smaller sign was more

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official: GREENACRE, NEW MEXICO. U. S. GOVERNMENT PROPERTY. LANDING PROHIBITED.

They landed.

A shaded roof path carried them across six houses, and at the seventh there were three military policemen guarding the roof door. They walked inside and a cool stairway led down into a rustic reception room. Two more MPs opened a side door for them.

Sanders stepped inside. He still knew a general when he saw one, and the impulse to salute was almost uncontrollable.

"You're Sanders?"

"That's right."

"A pleasure to meet you, sir. Have a chair, won't you?"

Sanders sat down, slightly stunned at being addressed as *sir* by a general.

"I'm General Ransom, Sanders. Intelligence. I want you to know how much we appreciate your coming up here like this."

"No trouble at all." Sanders wanted a cigarette. The general was a big, pleasantly ugly man with gray hair and sharp blue eyes. Sanders rather liked him.

"You realize, naturally, that what you see and hear in this place must be treated as top secret information. We're counting on your discretion."

"I understand that, General Ransom."

"Okay." The general paced across the room and then sat down behind his desk. He unlocked a drawer and took out a small box. The box was three inches on a side. It was ordinary enough in appearance, although it was metallic. The general drummed his fingers on his desk. Then, abruptly, he slid the top off the box and handed the box to Sanders. "In your opinion, Dr. Sanders, what *is* that?"

Sanders took the box and looked inside. "Can I take it out?"

"Certainly."

He took the object out and held it in his hand. It was a piece of brown rock two and a half inches long by two inches wide. He examined it carefully. The top of the rock was smooth and worn. The bottom had been neatly chipped by pressure flaking to make a V-shaped edge. The flake scars were clearly visible. Looked at from the side, the object was slightly concave on its worked edge. He gripped it, holding it with the smooth top surface in the palm of his hand.

"Well, Doctor?"

"I assume this is important, for some reason?"

"Very important."

He picked his words with care. "It's made out of flint or chert, or something closely resembling it. The bottom edge has definitely been worked — I'd say by means of indirect pressure flaking. In my opinion, it's an artifact — a tool made by man. It may be a scraper; that's a common tool used to flesh hides and that sort of thing. Hard to tell what it was used for, though. It's a fairly crude implement, but it's

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well made of its type. Nothing too unusual, I'm afraid."

The general leaned forward. "How old is it?"

Sanders shrugged. "Sorry, but I can't tell that from the scraper alone. Most of them are pretty much alike, and you'll find them all over the world and from the early Pleistocene right on down to the present. If it was found in association with bones or charcoal or pottery or projectile points — damn near anything — or if it was found eroding out of a datable geological stratum, I might be able to take a stab at it."

"It was found all by itself, on the surface of a desert," General Ransom said, smiling.

"Then dating would be just guesswork, really."

"But it *is* an artifact?"

"I'd say so, yes. I didn't know you boys were so interested in primitive cultures."

"That," said the general, "would depend on where the primitives *are*."

"Apaches on the warpath again?"

"No — though we do have one over at the field who's a first class rocket engineer. I wish the Apaches were all we had to worry about. Tell me, Doctor: if you, as an archeologist, had to find out more about this little gadget — who made it, how old it is, that sort of thing — how would you go about it?"

Sanders frowned. "I'd go back to where it was found and try to find another one in place. If we could get one in a dig — excavate it, that is, in association with some other stuff — we should be able to give you more information on it."

"Would you be willing to undertake such a search, doctor, if the government asked you to do so?"

"Certainly, if it's important. I have classes to think of, of course. Where did it come from, anyway — somewhere around here?"

"That's one way of looking at it, Dr. Sanders. It came from Mars."

He was a little slow on the uptake. Then it hit him. "But that means —"

"Exactly," said General Ransom.

He was a little surprised at his own calm acceptance of the fact that men had landed on Mars, but then he had been expecting it, really, along with everybody else.

But an artifact was something else again.

An artifact was a tool made by man.

Or by something like a man?

"Why me?" he asked. "I'm no spaceman. I like it here."

"I'll be perfectly frank with you. Our expedition was made on a strictly hush-hush basis; that isn't necessarily the way I would have preferred it, but with the world situation the way it is that's the way it had to be. Sooner or later, the news has got to be released. We've got a knotty little job ahead of us at the United Nations. We have no right to keep that artifact quiet, and when we talk about it there are

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some questions that have to be answered. Do you understand me?"

"Well, I see why you need an archeologist. Why me?"

"We can't force you to go."

"I realize that. I just want the reasons."

Ransom ticked them off. "One, you can be trusted. Two, we feel you're the man for the job — well trained, but with a shot or two of imagination. Three, you're in good shape physically — though an examination will have to clear you officially, of course. Finally . . . may I be blunt?"

"Sure."

"Your wife divorced you, I understand."

The old pain stabbed at him, but he kept his face expressionless. "That's right."

"Your parents are dead. You have one son in the oil business. You don't get on with him too well."

"Yes."

"You've chosen to work at a small private college. Your absence can be covered."

"In other words, I won't be missed if I don't come back."

"I wouldn't put it quite that way."

Sanders looked at the artifact in his hand. He put it back in the box and handed it to Ransom. "I'll do what I can."

"We're grateful, Sanders. You can pick your medal if you want one. And don't worry: we'll get you there and we'll get you back. That ship can carry three men. Your pilot will be Colonel Ben Cooper — he made the first flight, so he's the best we've got. You pick the other man. You know what we want, and you know who you can work with best."

Sanders didn't hesitate. "That'll be Ralph Charteris over at Santa Fe. He's thirty-eight, he knows his stuff, and he's technically unmarried. He's a research man, so nobody'll think it's funny if he disappears for a spell."

"Got you. Takeoff will be in ten days. You'll want to get things in shape."

"Okay."

The two men shook hands.

The ten days went by in a hurry.

He made out a will, a job he had been postponing for years, and managed to spend a day fishing with two friends in Matagorda Bay.

He phoned his son Mark in Houston. Their talk was unsatisfactory as usual, full of forced heartinesses. He couldn't tell him where he was going, and he was glad when the call was over.

He didn't call Ellen.

The ship lifted on schedule.

Within an hour, there was no blue sky.

He thought briefly of himself: forty-two years old, on the thin side, horn-rimmed glasses. He probably looked a lot like a professor. He felt singularly out of place in a spaceship.

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He looked at the screen. He saw cold stars and a frozen sun. He saw black distances and long, long silences. He saw his own life far away and lost: a life that had been too lonely, and too fast.

He stopped looking.

The atomic drive was soundless except for a high, irritating vibration that seemed part of the ship. Magnets kept him anchored and after an initial vertigo the weightlessness meant an annoying indigestion and little else.

They had some good bourbon, and it helped.

They were neither hot nor cold.

Ralph Charteris was a big blond giant of a man, and little Ben Cooper always referred to him as the biggest mass on the ship. "Let's talk about rocks, Sanders," he said. "Tell me what the devil that scraper was doing on Mars — figure it out in true Boy Scientist fashion so we can turn around and go home."

Sanders smiled, sipping his bourbon. He liked to talk, although he knew it was just a device for getting outside himself. "I'll give you six fast answers, Ralph."

"Fire," Ralph said, chewing on an empty pipe.

"Here's the deal. A ship — the first one, mind you — lands on a supposedly uninhabited planet. It's mostly all desert and a yard wide, as I understand it, and the air is shy on oxygen. We've all been solemnly assured by our astronomical colleagues that people like ourselves couldn't exist on Mars. Oh, maybe some outlandish freak without any carbon molecules in his carcass, but not *people*. So what do they run right smack into? An artifact. Nothing queer or strange or alien. Nothing to make them swat their helmets and holler, 'Them's Martians, by gum!' Just a perfectly ordinary scraper — it's a miracle that botanist spotted it at all. So what's the most logical explanation, the one that strains the credulity the least?"

"It's a hoax," Ralph said quietly.

"You thought of it too, hmmmm? The simplest way for that scraper to get there would be for one of the men to have picked it up on Earth, carried it to Mars, tossed it on the sand, and then 'discovered' it. The botanist could have done it."

"I don't much think Schlicter was a dishonest man, Sanders," Ben Cooper said.

"Remember Piltdown," Ralph said.

"Exactly. I don't say that Schlicter planted that scraper — I just say that's the simplest explanation."

"Let's have some more ideas."

"Here's another: the artifact is not native to Mars, but was left there by a party of interstellar travellers. In that case, the catch is why they would leave a flint scraper behind. I can't figure a culture with spaceships and scrapers."

"Maybe they were shipwrecked," Ralph suggested. "Maybe one man

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was left behind, thrown on his own resources."

"Can't see it," Ben Cooper objected. "What's he supposed to scrape with that thing — sand pies? We didn't spot any animal life to speak of, except for those little things that looked like moles."

"Still, we can't *rule it out*," Sanders said. "Try this: there has been some contact between Earth and Mars we don't know anything about. A ship came here maybe half a million years ago, dropped the scraper for some reason, and hightailed it back home."

"This space travel does great things for the imagination," Ralph said sourly.

"I'm trying to name possibilities, no matter how far-fetched. I'm aware, I think, of the mythological nature of Atlantis, Mu, Lemuria, and the Lost Continent of Lake Erie. Remember the old dictum of Mr. Holmes: eliminate the impossible, then hang onto what's left."

"What *is* left?"

"Number four: just like the last one, but the ship came from Mars, picked up the scraper on Earth, came back home and dropped it. Maybe it happened a million years ago. Since that time, Mars has lost her civilization and her cities are covered with sand. And *don't* tell me civilizations can't disappear."

"Sounds pretty gassy to me."

"They had to dig to find Troy. They had to dig to find some Biblical towns. You already have to dig to find some of the army forts on the American frontier —and they're only a few hundred years old."

"It's your theory, friend."

"Number five," Sanders continued, running a hand through his sandy hair. "Man evolved on Mars and then migrated to Earth, maybe half a million years ago when water got scarce. In other words, the primate evolution evidence on Earth is misleading."

Ralph Charteris bit down hard on his pipe stem, and then remembered to relax. "You're kidding. How about the South African stuff — Australopithecus and all that? How about Pithecanthropus? Sinanthropus? Neanderthal? Swanscombe? How come when they got to Earth they went back to living in caves and rock shelters? Dammit, Sanders, you're trying to make me sore."

"Not at all. Here's my parting shot: that artifact was left on Mars by some representatives of a galactic civilization. It was left there on purpose, for us to find, as a kind of I.Q. test. They want to see how we handle the situation. How's that?"

"You're a wild man with a theory, Sanders."

"Listen, Doc," Ben Cooper said slowly. "What do you *really* think?"

Sanders looked at him and shook his head. "I don't know, Ben," he said. "I just don't know."

They didn't have much to say after that.

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They started up a poker game with magnetized cards.

They waited.

Seventeen days later, the ship landed.

They put on their airsuits and stepped outside.

There was no wind and they stood in utter silence. The ship had come down on the flat top of a mesa. Small, thorny plants with tiny green flowers were scattered loosely between worn outcroppings of reddish brown rock. The mesa was not high, and at its base was the desert, a motionless sea of gently rolling sand, so light brown that it almost appeared white.

The sky was a deep blue, very close to a cold black directly overhead but somewhat lighter near the close horizons. There was one large dirty yellow cloud hanging just over the desert floor to the south.

Sanders shivered, although it was not yet cold. He blinked his eyes, grateful for the filter lenses in his airsuit. The sun was brighter than he had ever seen it on Earth, and it was a fierce, naked brightness that pelted the low hills and deserts with shattering attacks of light.

Here, in the lost immensities of a strange and silent world, his glib theories of a few days ago could find no expression. Here were fundamentals, and the raw truths of simplicity.

Quite casually, as though unimpressed by the enormity of the moment, a creature that looked too much like a gopher for comfort stuck his head out from behind a rock and surveyed them with decided suspicion.

Sanders eyed the gopher the same way.

"Well," Ralph said into his suit mike, staring out at the glaring wastelands, "I'd settle for a needle in a haystack any day."

A planet is huge, Sanders thought. *You cannot imagine how great it is. Suppose some creature came to Earth searching for artifacts, and all the people were gone. Where would he look? How long would it take? How many undiscovered sites are there on Earth, even today?*

"Ben," he said, "can you see where the scraper was found from here?"

Ben Cooper shook his head. "I set her down as close as I could figure to where we landed before, but it's hard to get your bearings here. We're close, I'd say — maybe fifty miles. We could get the copter out and spot it — we left a big circle of rocks on the sand."

Sanders looked out. It was like standing on the beach of an ocean. There were winds on Mars, and dust storms. When the winds blew, the sands shifted. It was a lousy spot to do archeology.

"What do you think, Ralph?"

Ralph put his hands on his hips. Even he was dwarfed by the vastness around him. "No point in digging up the Sahara, I guess.

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The scraper was a surface find, and Schlicter said he couldn't find a site under it. If there's one artifact, and this deal is on the level, there must be more."

"I'll buy that. How about this mesa?"

Ralph shrugged. "We don't know what we're doing. How do we know where they lived? One place is as good as another."

Sanders examined the ground. "Lots of erosion. But those rocks and plants have held the soil down pretty well. Probably phenomenal root systems on those plants — no water that I can see. It beats the desert. It *feels* like the kind of a place . . ."

The excitement grew in him.

"Let's have a look," Ralph said.

The three men split up and started to search the mesa, moving in the peculiar bent shuffle of a man trying to spot flaked stones on the ground.

The ship stood quietly behind them; it rested on the thorny plants and was nothing against a backdrop of emptiness.

The sun was white and cast sharp black shadows. The temperature was a comfortable fifty degrees Fahrenheit. There was no breeze, and not a sound.

Sanders wanted a cigarette, but couldn't figure out how to light one in his airsuit. He moved rapidly, his eyes on the ground, looking for rock concentrations, or fired rock, or bones; or flake chips. He found that the slight gravity affected him hardly at all, except that he felt stronger than usual.

He was content.

This was the part of archeology he liked best: you were alone, far from the cities, and the next hill was never too far away.

It took him three hours to find what he was looking for. By then the sun was lower, and it was growing cold.

"Over here," he said into his suit mike.

He didn't touch anything. Ralph and Ben came over in great leaping bounds, and the three of them got down on their knees and stared.

It wasn't anything much. The soil looked a little darker than the surrounding area, and there was some cracked rock. The darker soil made an irregular circle about four feet in diameter. There was a green flower growing in the middle of it.

There were flint chips.

There was one core, with long flake scars on it.

"Get the camera," Sanders said.

The night was very cold and filled with stars. Phobos was visible, but unimpressive. The men slept restlessly.

Next day, they went to work.

They mapped the site and plotted a north-south line and used string to lay out the area in two-foot squares. They got their notebooks and centimeter sticks ready.

Sanders and Ralph got out their small triangular trowels and began

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to scrape the surface of the site, very gently. Ben Cooper watched. At first, he almost held his breath.

After six hours without results, it was less exciting.

They took it down in two-inch levels and filtered all the dirt through a fine mesh screen. They worked all day and found one flint chip.

The next day they found nothing at all.

Late in the afternoon of the third day, when they were ten inches down, Ralph's trowel scraped something hard. He stuck his trowel in the hip pocket of his airsuit and took out a small whisk broom. Very carefully, he brushed the dirt away.

Sanders came over and watched.

The uncanny thing was the complete familiarity of the scene. They had both dug sites like this a hundred times, and with the same results.

Ralph uncovered a broken projectile point.

They measured its exact position in the site and photographed it in place. Then Ralph lifted it out and handed it to Sanders. The base of the point was intact, with two neatly chipped shoulders. Both sides of the thin point were nicely flaked. The tip was broken. The whole thing, without the tip, was a little over three inches long and an inch wide.

"Arrowhead?" asked Ben.

"Probably not," Ralph said. "Too big for that."

"Unless," Sanders smiled, "whoever made it was a giant."

"Cut that out, Sanders."

"Okay. Provisionally, it's a spear point or a knife. That's what it looks like to me."

"Bag it."

Sanders placed the point in a cloth bag and labeled it. Then he took up his trowel and went back to work in his own square.

When night fell, they had found nothing else.

They stuck with the site for ten days. Before they were through, the gophers had gotten used to them and came over to watch them dig. The site played out at the four foot level. They had found two scrapers, one more broken point, and a piece of charred bone. The bone was not human; it was quite small and seemed to be a femur of some sort. There was no pottery.

"Well," Sanders said, "we may be able to get a radiocarbon date on that bone when we get back, but I don't know how good it'll be. Otherwise, we don't know beans about the geology — if that's the word I want — and there's no telling how old the stuff is. It wasn't left here yesterday, though."

"We *do* know something now."

"Yes. These artifacts are indigenous; nobody brought 'em here. It looks like we've got the remains of an old hunting and gathering culture, but we can't very well generalize from one site."

"In other words," Ben Cooper said, "there were Martians."

Sanders walked over to the edge

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of the low mesa and looked out across the desert sands, his mind filled with questions.

The silence came in from a long way off.

The desolation was old and patient and overwhelming.

"Come on," he said. "We've got a lot of work ahead of us."

Sites were not difficult to find.

The land had evidently been abandoned for a long time, and had been undisturbed. They spent a month sinking test pits and making surface collections, and then took the big-bladed copter from the ship and made two long flights in opposite directions.

Wherever they went, the story was the same.

Widely scattered artifacts, all of which could have been fitted into the Paleolithic of Earth without too much difficulty. Nothing that could be classed as Neolithic. No pottery, no traces of agriculture.

No skeletons.

No cities, no towns, no villages.

The land, Sanders thought, must always have been desperately poor. The food supply was uncertain, the water scarce. People must have lived in small, widely separated bands, spending every minute trying to stay alive. It would have been tough.

The lack of skeletons was not particularly surprising; old skeletal remains were always rare, and a man dropped more artifacts than bones in a lifetime.

They saw one large snake that vanished into the rocks before they could catch him.

"There's just one question left," Sanders said slowly, "and that's the big one. Are we dealing with an extinct form of life, or aren't we?"

"I was wondering myself," Ben said. "You take back in New Mexico and Arizona, now. You find lots of old places like the ones we've been digging up — some of 'em go back maybe ten thousand years, they tell me. Just the same, the Indians are still there."

The silence of centuries covered the land.

"The country seems abandoned," Ralph said, sitting on a rock. "These people weren't far enough along for space travel. So where could they have gone?"

"Let me ask you a question, Ralph," Sanders said. "If you're in a strange country and you're looking for a place where people have lived, what would be the quickest way to find it on Earth?"

"Go where the water is," Ralph answered without hesitating.

"Next question: where *is* the water?"

"Around the poles is the only place," Ben said. "We flew over all that country last time and mapped the ice fields. There's no water at all anywhere else."

Sanders looked away, across the deserts, beyond the horizons. He felt small and lost and old.

"Let's go," he said.

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They left Ben Cooper with the spaceship, not entirely against his will. There was a strong two-way radio in the copter, and they all felt that it would only be sensible to hold one man in reserve.

The copter took off, a glittering bird under the morning sun.

The flight lasted three days. It was monotonous for the most part, an endless waste of silent sand, broken occasionally by low and rocky hills. They saw no animals from the air, and only a few cactus-like plants rooted in the shifting sands. There was one bad dust storm that boiled across the desert floor, but they got above it without difficulty.

There were no canals. There were not even streaks that might have resembled canals. The canals, Sanders thought, were like the Western Sea, the Northwest Passage, the Seven Cities of Cibola. Like all dreams, they were seen best from far away.

As they drew near the polar ice, even the days were bitterly cold. The sky was almost black and there were thin blue mists of ice crystals in the air. The desert sand below them became splotched with a dark, cold, swampy green. Thin hard snowdrifts were violet in the light of the frozen sun.

The copter landed near the edge of the polar ice on a narrow ridge of slick, mossy rock. The land closely resembled some parts of Earth, where you get up above the timber-line in cold mountain air and water from glacial lakes trickles down across the gray wet rocks.

They got out.

They heard the frozen silence, and that was all.

Sanders looked around slowly, feeling the cold eat through his clothing and chill his feet. There was a lake of white-violet ice to his left, like glass in the snow and the rocks. He stared at it for a long time.

"Ralph, have we got any line in the copter?" he said into his suit mike. It seemed odd not to see his frozen breath before him. "Anything we could use for a hook?"

"We might be able to rig up something."

They found some wire and torched a hook out of a spare copter ring. Sanders walked over to the lake, his feet coming down uncertainly on the light, crisp surfaces. He took the torch and carved out a small, neat circle in the ice.

There was deep black water beneath the ice.

He put a chunk of canned meat on the hook and lowered it into the hole.

"Here goes nothing," he said.

They waited, stirring the water occasionally to keep the ice from forming. They got good and cold. The silence was absolute.

An hour passed.

Another hour.

Something hit the hook. The wire jerked in Sanders' gloved hand and

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he would have lost it if it had not been wound around his wrist.

The wire cut through the black water with a *sssss.*

"Can you hold him?" Ralph whispered.

"I think so."

It was strong and heavy and full of fight. Sanders played it tautly, feeling it jerk against his wrist. He was sure he had it hooked. He began pulling the wire in, a loop at a time. His heart hammered in his chest and he was short of breath. If he could keep it from darting under the ice, snagging the line —

He saw him: a flash of gold in the cold black water.

He pulled, not too fast.

It flopped out on the ice and both men dived for him.

They held him as he squirmed under their gloves. They laughed and hollered unreasonably. They had him!

They ran a wire through his gills and held him up, still wiggling heavily.

He was a beauty: a slim firm five-pounder, sleek and solid gold with jet black fins. He looked more like a golden mountain trout than anything else, and he was the most beautiful fish Sanders had ever seen.

"Get him in the water. We don't want to kill him."

They lowered him into the icy water on the stringer and then anchored the line to a stub of mossy rock. They looked at each other, grinning happily.

"There's a food supply here," Sanders said.

"Look!"

He followed Ralph's pointing finger and saw a small black shape on the ice. It slithered away as he watched, moving toward the swampy country beyond. It looked like a cross between an otter and a seal.

"This is where the life is, Ralph. This is where he's got to be."

The emptiness and the silence closed in around them, but the wire into the water was taut and moved as they watched, back and forth across the hole in the ice.

Three days later, they found him.

He was not three hundred yards from the copter.

He stood quietly on the violet ice, watching them.

He could not have been mistaken for a human being of the type that they had known. But he was a man, and could have been nothing less.

"Don't scare him."

The man was not frightened. He was small, only slightly over four feet tall, and warmly dressed in black skins. He held a spear balanced in his right hand, and Sanders could see that he had an atlatl to throw it with. His face was very white with a high flush of red around the nose and on both cheeks. His eyes were narrow and there was no hair on his face. He wore a skin hood that covered his head, neck, and ears.

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He neither advanced nor gave ground.

He never saw an Earthman before, Sanders thought. *He hasn't learned to be afraid.*

"Get the fish," Sanders said.

Ralph hauled up the golden fish and handed it to Sanders. "Let me go first," Sanders said. "He won't worry so much about just one of us."

He took the fish and held it in his hand where the man could see it. He walked toward him, slowly.

The man stood his ground.

Sanders got close enough to touch him. He noticed that his eyes were brown. He held out the fish with his right hand. With his left hand he pointed first to the fish and then to the man. He smiled.

The man took the fish, sniffed it, and broke its neck with one quick jerk. He put the fish in a pouch he carried around his waist. He smiled back, showing white even teeth. He put his spear down on the ice and pushed back his hood. He took a bone comb out of his straight black hair and handed it to Sanders.

Sanders took it. He pointed to himself. "Sanders," he said slowly. "San-ders."

The man caught on instantly. "Narn," he said, pointing to himself. His voice, picked up by Sanders' suit phones, was high and musical. He said nothing else.

Sanders led him over to Ralph. He introduced them and the man repeated Ralph's name. Then he repeated Sanders' name and pointed to Sanders. He smiled, happily.

The three men stood on the ice, completely stumped by the frustrating wall of language.

He has a language, Sanders thought. *Certainly, he doesn't live alone, because he is a man. His people must hunt and fish and gather what plants there are here. No agriculture, no cities, no nothing. This land won't support but a handful. How many? Fifty? Sixty? A hundred? They never had much of a chance on this world. What happens to them now? What happens to them now — after they've met the men from Earth?*

There was no wind, there was only cold.

Desolation was all around them.

The man in the black skins looked at the shining copter curiously.

"Narn," he said again, and pointed.

Sanders turned to Ralph. "Guess he wonders what it is," he said.

Ralph pointed to himself, and then to the copter. He pointed into the dark sky and moved his finger in an arc to the ground.

Instantly, Narn grew agitated. He tried to talk, rapidly, and then abandoned the attempt. He pointed at the copter, and then into the air. His eyes were bright and excited.

"He thinks we came from the sky in the copter," Ralph said.

"Didn't we?"

Narn pointed again at the copter and tugged Sanders' arm.

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"He wants to see it up close, Ralph."

"Okay by me."

Narn hurried across the ice, easily, without effort. Sanders and Ralph couldn't keep up with him. When they reached the copter, Narn was already patting its sides and trying to lift it off the ground.

"Boy," Sanders said, shivering in the cold, "we don't awe this guy any."

"Does he really want to go up?"

Narn settled that question. He pointed insistently up into the clear air. He grinned from ear to ear.

"Roll all the windows down," Sanders said. "We'll keep our suits on."

He helped the man into the copter and strapped him in a seat. Narn was not happy about the strap, but seemed to trust them. He looked around eagerly.

Ralph took the copter up five hundred feet and then loafed along over the rocks and the ice and the wet green mosses. Narn stared from the copter to the ground and back again. He did not try to speak. He watched Ralph intently. The look in his eyes was almost religious in its intensity.

Sanders stayed at his side.

They had been in the air ten minutes when Narn spoke.

"San-ders."

Sanders turned and smiled.

Narn pointed at himself, and then at the copter controls.

"This," Ralph said slowly, "is about where I get out."

"San-ders."

"My God," Ralph said. "He can't fly this thing."

Sanders leaned forward. "How do you *know* he can't!"

"He's never even *seen* a copter before."

"San-ders. San-ders."

Sanders looked at Narn and wondered. "He's about the last of his kind, Ralph," he said finally. "He's lived on a world that's tough beyond belief, lived there maybe for millions of years. He's used what there was, gone as far as he could in a hopeless ecological situation. He's survived."

"Sure, sure. I'm all for him. Adaptability. High intelligence. But no man can go from a spear-thrower to a copter in ten minutes."

"He's a different kind of man, Ralph."

Ralph shrugged. "It's your life. You get up here with him."

Sanders unbuckled the strap that held Narn to his seat. He led him to the controls of the hovering copter, squeezing past the white-faced Ralph Charteris. Narn sat down, cautiously. Sanders stood just behind him.

The man seemed absurdly small in the pilot's seat. He looked at Sanders. Sanders nodded, smiled, and crossed his fingers.

Very slowly, duplicating the motions he had seen Ralph make, the man moved the wheel and strained to reach the floor pedal. The copter lurched and lost altitude. Sanders

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started to reach for the controls, but Narn did not panic. Carefully, exactly, he compensated for the fall.

The copter straightened.

Sanders stumbled back and sat down.

"Well, I'll be damned," Ralph said.

The man piloted the ship for fifteen minutes, across violet fields of ice, flying steadily through the air. An icy wind blew through the ship, but Sanders hardly noticed it. He was completely stunned.

Narn, too, had found an artifact.

He took the ship back to almost exactly the position it had held when he had taken over the controls. He was tense and there was sweat on his face. It was terribly hot for him in the copter, even with all the windows open.

He let Saunders land the copter.

Narn hurried to get outside and sat down on the ice, resting.

After a few minutes, he got up and embraced each of the men in turn.

"Narn," he said proudly. "Narn."

The man in the black skins pointed across the ice and beckoned.

"He wants us to go with him," Sanders said.

Ralph was still trying to get his thoughts straightened out. "I don't know," he said. "One of us will have to stay with the ship."

Sanders nodded. "I want to go, Ralph. I'll take the pocket radio and throw out a beam so you can track me. Will you give me twenty-four hours, and then come and get me?"

Ralph hesitated. "Okay, Sandy," he said finally. "You watch yourself. These boys are nothing to fool around with."

Sanders smiled at Narn. "We'll get along," he said.

They shook hands, and Sanders set off with Narn across the violet ice.

The bitter cold ate into him, turning his bones to ice.

They went a long, long way, across the cold and the rocks and the silences. Sanders felt his age, and it was hard for him to keep up. He damned his own inability to talk.

He had never seen such loneliness.

Here, Sanders thought, *here before me is the ultimate in isolated cultures. Here is a culture that has had to figure it all out for itself, with no help from anywhere. Here is a man who flew a copter the first time he saw one. Here is a simple man that some would call a savage. What might he become — now? How far might we go, together?*

It took them three hours. Sanders was sore and his feet were numb with cold before they came to a valley of ice and rocks. The excitement of what he saw revived him a little.

The valley was pocked with caves: black holes against the faded light of the faraway sun.

They picked their way up a smoothly inclined path and paused before a cave entrance. Sanders couldn't see a thing, but Narn took

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him by the arm and led him inside.

Some twenty paces beyond the outside hole they came to what could only be called a door. Narn pressed three places on it very carefully and it swung open. A soft green glow spilled through the opening and in its gentle light Sanders could see that the door was beautifully made of hides stretched over a bone frame.

They walked through semi-darkness now, their footsteps hollow in the vault of the rocks. Gradually, the greenish light shifted to a warm yellow. Sanders noticed that the source of the illumination was hidden in the cave roof over their heads: glowing rocks that seemed to be built into the cave itself. He guessed that the rocks were of natural origin, but their cunning arrangement betrayed the revising hand of man. He knew little enough about indirect lighting, but this was as efficient a system as he had ever seen.

They stepped down into a large, well-lighted room. A tiny fire — hardly large enough to toast a marshmallow comfortably — flickered in the center, and around it sat a woman and a child. Smaller caves branched from the cavern and lost themselves in the rocks.

Sanders saw something that took his breath away.

The child was holding a toy cart in his arms.

The cart had wheels on it.

God, he thought. *A Stone Age culture lost in the ice, and a toy cart with wheels. It had to be a toy, of course — they have no domesticated animals to pull a real cart. Narn's people are so few, so isolated. All his inventions had to come from a handful of people, without help from outside. There was a brain in that skull. . . .*

He noticed a light sled, with bone runners, standing against a wall. After the wheeled cart, it came as something of an anticlimax — though it was certainly more useful in the polar ice and snow.

"San-ders," Narn said.

The woman took her child's hand and moved back, shyly. She stood by a basin of crystal-clear water, her eyes on the stranger. She said nothing.

Sanders stood still, uncertain what to do. He felt as though he had stepped backward in time a million years, back through an enchanted cave that wound through ageless rock, back through history to an age when man was only a whisper in the wind. . . .

He felt his palms sweating inside his airsuit.

Narn shook his head.

"Don't afraid," the man in the black, sewn skins said carefully. "Don't afraid, San-ders."

He's learning our language already! What have we found?

A hand touched his arm.

He started, surprised back to reality. Narn's boy was smiling gravely, pulling at his sleeve.

Sanders walked slowly to the cen-

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ter of the room, and sat down before the tiny fire. He saw that the fire was really a kind of lamp — a stone dish of fat with a wick in it. Narn's woman took her place opposite him. There was only friendliness in her eyes.

Somehow, something passed between them. A little of the loneliness that Sanders had always had with him melted and was gone.

The lamp-fire threw steady shadows on the cave walls.

Narn sat down by his side.

Sanders was suddenly very aware of his exhaustion, but he couldn't relax. His body ached with cold and fatigue, and his mind was so saturated with emotion that he felt a certain blankness. He was vaguely hungry, but he could not eat in his suit. He was tired, with dark circles under his eyes, but he was not sleepy.

He felt curiously at home.

He sat there, smiling, and he was glad that words were not necessary.

Finally, he stretched out by the tiny fire, looked at Narn, and closed his eyes.

Sleep was a long time in coming, and when it came it was nothing to write home about. Solid rock is not the ultimate in mattresses, and he was keyed up to a point where he could not relax. He dozed fitfully, and his own spasmodic snores woke him up twice. His stiff, aching body did the trick the third time, and after that he knew that he had all the sleep he was going to get.

He lay still, trying to keep his thoughts from bouncing back and forth between scrambled eggs and Gargantuan steaks. He listened to the silence.

"San-ders?"

He looked up. Narn was squatting by his side.

"I'm awake," Sanders said, not knowing whether or not he would be understood. "You have insomnia too?"

Narn frowned at the last question, evidently storing it away for future reference. He pointed to one of the caves that branched out from the central cavern. "Come?"

Sanders got up. His body was one large ache.

Narn led him across the floor of the room, and into a dark hole. The passage was narrow and poorly lighted at first, but it gradually broadened as they walked. Sanders felt a little better. He guessed that Narn was going to show him something — another family, perhaps, or even an underground river.

The cave opened up, abruptly, into a high cavern perhaps fifty yards in diameter. The light was astonishing — soft greens and yellows and pinks, washing down from glowing rocks set into the very roof of the chamber.

Narn stopped, and pointed.

Sanders suddenly forgot his pains and his weariness. He held his breath so long that the blood pounded in his forehead before he remembered to breathe again.

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He said nothing, for what he saw was beyond words.

The walls were alive. A man smiled down on him, and he could see his white even teeth and the glint of humor in his brown eyes. A landscape of violet ice lost itself in frozen immensities. A golden fish twisted in dark water, rising to a lure. A yellow storm boiled across a bleak desert, and cold stars were serene and splendid in the heavy velvet of an arctic night.

It was beyond reality, beyond his wildest dreams.

Paintings, yes — but you had to remind yourself of that. Their colors were vividly real, and enhanced by a masterly use of the light from the glowing rocks.

The perspective was perfect, the style naturalistic.

That wasn't all.

There were neat, geometrical marks in bands under the paintings. Writing, beyond a doubt, covering panel after panel — and there were more caverns beyond.

Written history, on the walls of a cave — going back how many hundreds of thousands of years?

There were other marks that looked suspiciously like mathematics, a series of triangles that almost had to be geometry.

Sanders sat down, right in the middle of the cavern. He was stunned, and more than that.

The toy cart had been enough of a jolt, even after Narn had flown the copter.

After all, toy carts had been found in Mexico archeologically, and the main differences were in the relative sizes of the two populations, and in their respective degrees of isolation.

This was a different kettle of fish.

This was almost a miracle.

There was an excellent naturalistic cave art in the Upper Paleolithic of Europe, but it was a far cry from the paintings in *this* cave. And the Cro-Magnons were millennia away from writing, to say nothing of mathematics.

Sanders sat there, lost in the rush of his own thoughts.

Even on Earth, you had to be careful when you reconstructed a culture solely from what survived of their technology. The maze of the Australian kinship systems could never be forgotten; the Maya invented the concept of zero with a Neolithic economy. And here were a people blocked technologically by a hopeless environment, forced to channel their culture along other lines. . . .

A new kind of people.

"You like?" asked Narn.

He watched Sanders with pleasure sparkling in his eyes.

"I like," Sanders said fervently. "More?"

Narn smiled, and led the way into another cavern lost in the rock beneath the ice.

Sanders almost forgot about Ralph Charteris and the copter. When he

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and Narn walked back through the central cavern and out into the valley, they had only a few minutes to spare.

They stood in the long valley with the sky almost black above them.

The cold was bitter and very still. A thin blue mist of ice crystals was motionless against the snow.

A cold, hard world.

Sanders looked into Narn's eyes, and saw there a wordless hope.

Sanders knew that hope.

When the copter came, a dot against the black sky, they both knew that one chapter had ended and that a new one had begun.

It was *their* copter now.

Side by side, they waited for it to land.

Far above them, shining through the pale disc of the sun, the stars burned in an ocean of loneliness.

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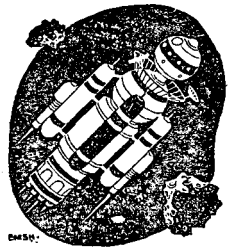

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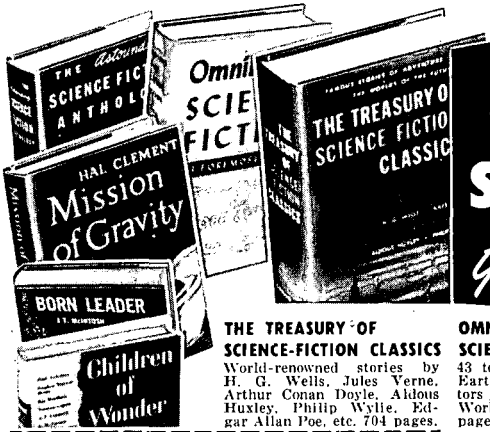
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